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OR,

The Ghouls of Galveston.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

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"DEADWOOD DICK, JR." NOVELS, "DENVER
DOLL," "YREKA JIM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE CASE.

GALVESTON, TEXAS!

"A charming city, located upon an island, in the Gulf of Mexico, and noted for its delightful climate, its fine beach, and—its beautiful women;—a point of interest on which the pen of the author seldom dwells.

One pleasant morning, in early summer, two men were seated in an elegantly appointed office

"MISTER DEADWOOD DICK," THE PUG SAID, THROUGH THE APERTURE OF HIS MASK, "YOU ARE SUMMONED INTO THE PRESENCE OF THE CAPTAIN OF THE GHOUls."

fronting upon one of the principal avenues of the city.

The office, evidently, was that of an attorney, for it contained a well-stocked library of a legal nature.

The elder of the party was a portly person of over fifty years, with a massive, intelligent countenance, keen, gray eyes, and hair and beard liberally streaked with gray.

He was well dressed, and bore the stamp of being a man of affluence.

The other person was in the twenties, and although only of medium stature, was, at a glance, supple, wiry and muscular.

His face indicated resolution and force of character, while, at the same time, it was peculiarly handsome, with a firm but pleasant mouth, piercing eyes, and healthy complexion, added to which was a graceful mustache and becoming head of hair, of brown color.

His attire, while not particularly elegant, was of neat appearance.

Judging by their conversation, they had only just met, when we introduce them to the reader.

"You are Mr. Horace Henshaw, I believe?" the younger man was saying, interrogatively.

"I am, sir," was the reply. "And you?"

"My name is Bristol—Richard Bristol."

The face of the elder man changed from a business look to an expression of pleasure.

"Ah! Then you are Deadwood Dick?"

"Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"Exactly. Believe me, sir, I am glad to meet you!" and Henshaw arose and shook his visitor by the hand, adding:

"I see you are prompt in answering my summons?"

"I always endeavor to be prompt in business," Dick replied, good-naturedly. "I received a telegram, sent to 'Frisco, notifying me that my services would be of value here, and so I came. The local chief of police referred me to you, and I'm on deck!"

"Quite right. I suppose you are curious to know what is wanted of you?"

"Well, yes, moderately."

"Well, then I will explain. I have traveled through the different territories, extensively, and in that way frequently heard of you as a bold and successful detective. Being in the need of such a man, I consulted a Government official, and was advised to try and reach you at 'Frisco. I placed the matter in the hands of the chief of police, and, as a result, I was successful, as after a short delay, we got an answer from you."

"Now, the case I have for you to tackle, is this: I want you to hunt down a band of grave-robbers!"

"Grave-robbers?"

"Exactly. For some time past, it is a well-known fact that an organized band has existed in this vicinity, whose business it is to prey upon the tombs of the dead. Within the past six months at least a half-dozen tombs have been disturbed, and possibly many more. The thing has become so prevalent, that some of the people stand in fear of burying their dead!"

"This is strange, indeed," Dick said. "What can be the object of this sacrilege? Have the bodies been spirited away?"

"Only in one instance, so far as we know. The corpse was that of a child, who had died very suddenly. The police believe, in this instance, that the body fell into the hands of a medical student or doctor, but I am not so sure."

"How about the other cases?"

"Well, they are most puzzling. The first case discovered was as follows: A friend of mine lost his daughter, suddenly, just before she was to have been married. On visiting her grave, the day after she was buried, he found that it had been disturbed.

"His daughter before her death, had received a number of valuable presents of jewelry from her lover, and at his request, these were buried with her."

"When the grave and casket were open, the corpse was found all right, but the jewelry was gone!"

"Humph! that's what I should call a cool robbery!"

"So it was. Another instance was that of a female miser, named Old Ruth, who was reported to have had a goodly sum of money buried with her."

"After the first robbery was ascertained, it was decided to open Ruth's coffin, which had been placed in a burglar-proof vault. No trace of any money was found, although the undertaker swears he placed it in the coffin, at the old woman's dying request!"

"How about the third case?"

"That was concerning the child. Case four and five, were the most singular of all. Two well-to-do citizens died, and the police, who have carefully suppressed from the public all news of these strange goings on, visited the widows of the deceased, and advised them to have their dead secretly disinterred. This was done, and the result was a most shocking discovery. Both bodies had been buried in costly suits of broadcloth, but the bodies were now nude, and the clothing gone!"

"By Jove! that's what I call tough!" Dick cried, in astonishment. "If this be true what you have been telling me, I should think it would have created a sensation that would have reached all over the country!"

"So it would, but for the police, who have constrained the relatives in each instance to keep the matter hushed up, so that the robbers might not be put upon their guard, you see."

"How come you into the secret, then?"

"Oh! the chief of police and I are great friends, and he told me, on the quiet. Then, too, I have had a somewhat similar experience. Some weeks ago, before I knew anything of all this, my niece died. She lived in New York, where her father is a retired speculator, but unfortunately a bed-ridden cripple. Flora—her name was Flora French—had been visiting us, but was suddenly taken off with diphtheria.

"I telegraphed to New York, of course, and notified her father of her death."

"He answered back to spare no pains or expense to have her casket elaborately mounted in solid silver, and have the remains put in a receiving vault, until he could send a man to escort them to New York."

"Well, his request was fulfilled to the letter. The massive handles, the plate, the corners, and even the lid screws, were all of solid silver. It cost over fifteen hundred dollars for those trimmings, alone."

"Well, knowing nothing of these ghouls, I had the remains put away in the vault, unsuspecting of danger. But after the police captain told me what he did, we concluded it would be advisable to pay a quiet visit to the vault, and we did so. My worst fears were realized. Everything that was silver about the coffin, was gone, even to the lid screws."

Dick uttered a prolonged whistle, and scratched his head meditatively, while Henshaw sunk back in his chair, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"This is the worst I ever heard!" Dick said, directly. "What did you do?"

"What could I do. I had the coffin remounted, at my own expense, and quietly removed to my house, where it remained, until a man came for it."

"What have the police been doing, all this time?"

"All in their power to ferret out the criminals, but to no avail."

"Have they not suspected any one?"

"No. They do not know who to suspect. Whoever perpetrates these outrages, are certainly adroit rascals, who understand their business."

"Very likely. Who carries the key to the receiving vault?"

"The superintendent of the cemetery, which chances to be your humble servant!"

"Ah!"

"Just so. I have held that position for some time."

"The grave-robbers must have a false key then?"

"Certainly."

"I should think the chief would have stationed a spy in the cemetery?"

"So he has. A private detective has been on duty, secretly, since the discovery of the second robbery, but that's all the good it has done. He has failed to see anything of these marauders, whatever."

"What's his name?"

"Gilbert Morey!"

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Oh! a decent sort of a fellow, I take it. He moves in good society, and seems to stand high in the estimation of the city authorities."

"It would seem that these grave robbers operate for the profit on what spoils they can secure?"

"Yes. As I look at it, when they can secure a haul, there are plenty of fences, in this and adjoining cities, through which they can dispose of their spoils, and so do a thriving business. It is not an uncommon occurrence for some people to bury costly trinkets with their dead and to ornament the coffins with silver

trimmings. The latter practice is becoming more and more common as the years advance. During the past six months these scavengers must have realized a couple thousand dollars or more!"

"It seems to me," Dick said, after a few seconds thought, "that it would be better if the matter had been made public!"

"The chief thinks not. Such an action would put the gang on their guard, and they would therefore be doubly hard to ferret out. The chief feels confident that his men will eventually nab them, if the matter is kept quiet, but I got tired of waiting on them, and so sent for you!"

"So you think I can catch them, eh?" with a smile.

"You bet I do! I have the greatest confidence, Richard, in your ability as a detective. I know, if I were a criminal, there's no man in America I'd fear to have on my trail as much as you!"

Dick laughed outright.

"You are inclined to flattery!"

"No, I am not, sir. I mean what I say. I want you to quietly take hold of this case, and see what you can do with it, and I will pay you well. I'm out so much money already, that I'm willing to be out considerable more, in order to bring these grave-robbers miscreants to justice!"

"Well, if you say so, I'll do what I can, Mr. Henshaw, but as you give me not the slightest clew to work on, I must say the outlook don't look very encouraging."

"Never mind that. You're one of those shadows who is liable to run upon a clew when one least expects it, my fine fellow. I've heard of you, and know what you can do. I'll wager a bottle of champagne you won't be a week before you're on the right trail. There is one thing, however, that I want to ask of you—that you will keep the matter hushed up until you are sure you have got your men. It wouldn't be using the chief right, you know."

"Very well. I will be as discreet as possible, sir."

"I know you will, my boy. Ah! here comes my son, now, with Gil Morey with him. It is not necessary for them to know you are a detective, you know!"

"No, nor any one else," Dick replied quickly

CHAPTER II.

THE BLAIRS.

DICK had scarcely finished speaking, when the door opened, and two young men of about his own age entered.

Both were well dressed, but after a style somewhat loud, and both were possessed of average good looks, one being a blonde, and the other a brunette.

The former had a free and easy going air, and could be set down as one who was not wont to be particularly worried, no matter what the circumstances.

The blonde was evidently of an entirely different nature, his hawkish face, and jet-black eyes, hair and mustache, indicating that he was of a more irritable and nervous temperament.

"Mr. Bristol, I will make you acquainted with my son, Harry," Horace Henshaw said, indicating the blonde young man, "and also with Detective Gilbert Morey. Boys, Mr. Bristol, of 'Frisco."

The introduction was acknowledged simply by bows, and then young Henshaw turned to his father.

"Dad!" he said, "I'm broke, and want some money!"

The elder Henshaw scowled.

"Harry, my boy," he replied, "were you ever known when you were not broke? What did you do with the last money I gave you?"

"Oh! it went, for one thing and another!"

"Principally on poker, I presume?"

"Nixee. You don't catch me playing poker any more, dad!"

"I hope not, sir. But, Harry, my son, I shall have to sit severely down on your frequent demands for money. You spend entirely too much."

"Oh! pshaw, dad; don't get cranky. You're well off, and I'm sure you don't want to see me distanced by other fellows whose parents are in poorer circumstances. Come, now, just let's have a couple of hundred cases, and I've got a sure spot on the races, by which I can clear a couple of thousand."

"Can't do it, sir. I have only about a hundred dollars about me."

"Well, that will do on a pinch. If I win at the races, I'll return it."

"I guess there's no danger of that," the law-

yer replied, as he reluctantly took a roll of bills from his pocket, and counted out a hundred dollars. "There now, don't come bothering me any more."

"All right, dad; I'll try not to," Harry replied, receiving the money, and thrusting it into his pocket. "Much obliged."

Then he and Gil Morey left the office together.

"Heigh-ho! That boy will bankrupt me yet, if I don't shut down on his demands for money," Horace Henshaw declared, after their departure. He don't seem to realize that it is much harder to acquire wealth than it is to spend it. He's a spoiled boy, is my Harry."

"Over-indulgence on the part of a parent has been the means of spoiling many a child," Dick philosophically declared.

"Very true, sir, very true. My boy has never known necessity, or what it was to work, and hence he is not as circumspect as he should be. A gang of his chums, as he calls them, hang around him, and help him spend his money. But, the thing must be stopped. If Harry wants to be a scapegrace, he must use his own resources in the future."

"You son is in the habit of gambling, I take it?"

"Yes, and it has cost him, or rather me, many a dollar."

"Is this detective one of the hangers-on you referred to?"

"No, I think not. I believe he has some money of his own, and I never took him for a man who would sponge upon an acquaintance. However, I may be mistaken."

After a few minutes more in conversation, Dick said:

"Well, Mr. Henshaw, if I am to undertake to root out these grave-robbers, I'll go and hunt me up a boarding-place, and then take a look around the city, so as to get the lay of the land."

"Quite right, sir; and if you do not care to put up at a hotel, permit me to recommend you to a delightful private boarding-cottage, overlooking the bay and beach. She is a personal friend of mine is Mrs. Blair, who keeps the place, and you will find everything comfortable and home-like. I will write you a letter of introduction, and it will fix things all solid for you."

Dick thanked him, and a few minutes later received a sealed note, with full directions where to present it.

He then took leave, promising to call again soon.

He had no difficulty in finding the place to which he had been recommended.

It proved to be a cosey-looking cottage, set down upon a little terraced lawn, directly overlooking and within a stone's throw of the beach and bay, which separates Galveston from the mainland.

Dick's ring brought a buxom, pleasant-faced matron to the door, and after delivering his message, he was invited into a neatly-furnished parlor, and given a seat.

"Why, this is from Mr. Henshaw, isn't it?" Mrs. Blair said, glancing at the superscription upon the envelope.

And a pleased expression dawned upon her features as she tore open the message and glanced at its contents.

"In lead!" she said. "Why to be sure we shall be only too glad to accommodate you, Mr. Bristol, as we want all the boarders we can get. My husband's long illness has made it necessary for myself and daughter to resort to keeping a few boarders in order to earn a livelihood. Bethel?"

In answer to her call, a young woman entered from an adjoining apartment.

It had been Deadwood Dick's good fortune to meet a good many handsome young ladies, but he could remember none so gloriously beautiful as this image of loveliness his gaze now rested upon.

She possessed a willowy, graceful figure, a face of rare sweetness and piquancy of expression, soft-brown eyes, and hair like a dream of summer sunshine.

Though plainly dressed, she was a picture that an artist would have gone into ecstasies over.

"Mr. Bristol, this is my daughter, Bethel. Bethel, Mr. Bristol, our new boarder. See that the second-story front is prepared for the gentleman's accommodation."

Bethel gracefully acknowledged the introduction, and then excusing herself, quietly withdrew.

"A remarkably pretty daughter you have, Mrs. Blair," Dick observed.

"Yes, Bethel is tolerable good-looking, sir," the mother replied, "although she is so diffident she don't care particularly to be reminded of it. I have always reared her to dislike flattery, and think I have attained my object. By the way, Mr. Bristol, you have only recently arrived in our city, I judge."

"About three hours ago."

"Then, you must be hungry. If you will excuse me for a few minutes, I will pick you up a lunch. Our dinner will be ready at six."

Dick thanked her and she withdrew, when the new boarder picked up a book and began to glance it over.

Suddenly he was surprised to see himself confronted by a haggard, emaciated individual, with long gray hair and beard—a wild-eyed man, whose cadaverous complexion and attenuated figure plainly indicated that he was a victim of consumption, or some other wasting disease.

He supported himself upon crutches, and was poorly dressed.

"Well, who are you?" the man demanded, in a sharp, rasping tone of voice.

"Oh! I'm a new boarder," Dick replied.

"New boarder, hey? Who told you to come here?"

"I was recommended by a gentleman named Henshaw!"

"Was, hey? I thought so. He recommends all the boarders to come here, curse him! He's an infernal rascal!"

Dick did not know what to say to this unexpected charge upon the lawyer, and so said nothing.

"Yes, he's an infernal rascal!" the old man pursued, vehemently, "and when you come to know him as well as I do, you will find I'm right. He knows I ain't long for this world, and he's waitin' for me to die, so that he can step into my shoes, and marry my widow. Oh! I know his game! He has found out that there is a big insurance on my life, and expects to get a whack out of it. But, he'll get left, as sure as my name is Ben Blair!"

And shaking his fist at the new-comer, the eccentric individual hobbled out of the room.

"Well! well!" Dick mused, when he was once more alone, "I wonder if I've struck a lunatic asylum, or what? I should infer that the old gent is a little off color, in the second-story. It may be, however, that he comes closer to the truth than I think, for it occurs to me now that Mrs. Blair seemed uncommonly pleased when she read Henshaw's letter."

Mrs. Blair soon came bustling in with a tempting lunch of cold meats and fruits, and while Dick proceeded to satisfy his hunger, she sat down and chatted with him.

"Do you intend to stay long in town, Mr. Bristol?" she asked.

"I am not prepared to say as to that," he responded. "I have some business matters to look after here, and do not know how long they will keep me."

"I hope you will stay a considerable while, anyhow, sir. The room I am having prepared for you is one of the best in the house, and immediately adjoins that occupied by Mr. Morey."

"Ah! Mr. Morey, the detective?"

"Yes, sir. Do you know him?"

"I have simply been introduced to him, that's all," Dick replied.

He soon afterward excused himself on the plea that he wanted to look around the city, and took his temporary departure.

"So this Morey is to occupy the room next to mine, eh?" he mused. "Kind of queer we should be thrown in so near contact with each other. I don't know how it is, but I took a dislike to the fellow the first I set eyes upon him."

He spent the remainder of the day in looking over the town, and was much pleased with what he saw, but failed to see just how he was to go to work to ferret out the identity of the grave-robbers.

At six o'clock he returned to the Blair cottage, and dined in company with Mrs. Blair and her daughter, there being no one else present.

Later in the evening, Dick lit a cigar, and sauntered down along the beach, which is noted for being one of the most beautiful in the Gulf region.

Here he encountered many pretty girls and gallants, and himself came in for a liberal share of sly glances from the gentler sex, for in truth there were few young men upon the promenade of more commanding presence than the stranger, albeit there were plenty who were more fashionably attired, and, as the saying goes, "put on more airs."

Finally tiring of the promenade, he turned to retrace his foot steps toward the Blair cottage,

when he unexpectedly came face to face with Bethel, who was very pale and had evidently been weeping.

"Oh! Mr. Bristol!" she cried. "I am so glad I found you. Mamma wants to know if you won't come to the house, and spend the rest of the evening. Papa has had another violent spell, and threatened to kill the both of us, and we are so afraid of him!"

"Certainly I will come," Dick replied. "What is the matter with your father, Miss Blair?"

"Oh! dear, he sometimes has crazy spells, and imagines that we are trying to put him out of the way, and gets so ugly we cannot do anything with him."

"That is very unfortunate. Perhaps any interference on my part will only make matters worse?"

"Oh! no it won't. He always quietes down and is peaceable, when any of the men folks are around. It is only when we are alone that he becomes so violent."

They hurried along together, in the direction of the cottage, when they came face to face with Gil Morey, who halted directly in their path.

"Miss Bethel!" he cried, his face darkening with passion, "I am astonished!"

"Astonished at me?" Bethel replied. "And why so, sir?"

"To see you out here promenading with a total stranger, whom you know nothing about. You should have more respect for yourself!"

"Mr. Morey, this gentleman is our new boarder, and mamma sent me after him!" Bethel cried, her eyes flashing with indignation. "Furthermore, sir, I believe I have the right to go with whoever I please."

"I don't know about that. After keeping steady company with me for over a year, I think I ought to have a word to say about that. You are not showing me the least respect by galavantin' around with every Tom, Dick and Harry!"

It was Deadwood Dick's turn, now, to flush with anger.

"Have a care, sir!" he cried, "how you address this young lady, in my presence. Your words are unbecoming a gentleman!"

"Bah! what do I care for you!" Morey sneered. "You're a nobody, anyhow, and don't know who you are talking to!"

"I know just who I am talking to, but what it is, I cannot say!" Dick declared, coolly; "and if the thing don't step aside, and go along about its business, I shall certainly try to find out the nature of it. Come! mosey!"

"Not for you! Miss Bethel's got to accompany me home—not you!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind, Gilbert Morey!" Bethel cried indignantly. "You are quite overreaching your authority, sir!"

"No! Miss Blair will not accompany you!" Dick declared, emphatically, "and if you don't step out of our path, I shall give you a lift you won't appreciate!"

"Bah! who's afraid of you? You're a dirty cur!"

"And this is my answer to that!" and stepping quickly forward, Dick gave Morey a resounding slap across the face that knocked that individual off his feet.

CHAPTER III.

THE EAR AT THE KEYHOLE.

GIL MOREY arose to his feet, and brushed the dirt off his clothes.

"I'll get even with you, curse you!" he cried, savagely shaking his fist at his assailant. "I'll pay you back, with interest, if it costs me my life, and don't you forget it!"

With which threat he turned and hurried away, while Dick and Bethel also hastened on toward the cottage.

"I am sorry that I was forced into that unpleasant scene!" Dick said, apologetically, "but, really, I couldn't put up with that fellow's abuse."

"You did perfectly right!" Bethel declared, "and I should not have blamed you if you had given him worse than you did. Maybe I will learn him a lesson that will do him good!"

"I consider that extremely doubtful," Dick answered, with a smile. "I don't believe any good was born in the fellow and it's a pretty hard work to break in an old bear, anyhow, so that he can be trusted."

And there the subject dropped.

When they reached the Blair cottage, they found Mrs. Blair standing in the doorway, wringing her hands, and looking greatly distressed.

"Oh, mamma, what is it?" Bethel cried, rushing forward. "Tell me, did he hurt you?"

"No! no! my child—worse than that. He fell ~~in~~ a fit, after you went out, and, before I could prevent him, he drew a knife and stabbed himself through the heart, killing himself almost instantly. It's all over, now; poor Benjamin will never suffer any more!"

As she spoke, she turned and led the way into the house, and to the dining-room, where, outstretched upon the floor, lay her husband, stone dead, a dirk-knife handle protruding from his bosom.

His face was considerably distorted, the eyes staring glassily toward the ceiling.

Dick knelt beside the stricken man, and felt for his pulse, but it had long since ceased to beat.

"Yes, he is dead," he said, "and as he was such an evident sufferer, it is, perhaps, better so. I suppose he better be left lying where he is, until the coroner views the remains."

"Yes, I suppose it would not be lawful to remove him. Would it be too much trouble for you to go to the police station, and have the coroner notified?"

"Oh! certainly not. I am quite at your command!" Dick replied. "Is there any one else you want notified?"

"You might stop at Mr. Henshaw's, on the way, and tell him. He is an old friend, and will be very sorry to hear of what has happened."

"I am not so sure whether he will or not!" Dick mused, as he took his departure. "If the deceased was right in what he told me, I should presume Henshaw will be secretly elate over the affair!"

He stopped and left word at the Henshaw office, and then went on to Police Headquarters, where he had the coroner notified.

This done, he returned to the Blair cottage.

Horace Henshaw had already arrived, and was endeavoring to console the widow, and evidently was on a fair way to success, for she didn't seem to take her husband's death very much to heart.

Nor did Bethel.

A cynic might have formed the opinion that the suicide was a welcome thing to the family.

"Of course, it is a very sad case, my dear Mrs. Blair," Henshaw was saying, "but not so bad as it might have been. Your husband has left you the ten-thousand-dollar insurance policy, and that will provide for you very nicely."

"Very true, Mr. Henshaw, but, will there not be some trouble about collecting the money on account of my husband having committed suicide?"

"In all probability there would; but, you see, I am attorney for the company, which is a local concern, and if any one can pull the case, I can."

"Thank you! thank you, Mr. Henshaw. You are very kind, and always have been. But, will it not cost considerable?"

"Undoubtedly it will cost something; but, of that we will speak at another time. I will figure on it, and let you know my price for making the collection. I will do it for you much cheaper than any one else."

Dick had overheard this conversation, and it caused his mind to revert to what Mr. Blair had told him before his tragic death.

"I begin to believe this Henshaw is playing a game for gain," the detective mused, "and I'm not going to lose track of the matter. Mrs. Blair is not going to be swindled, if I can help it."

The coroner arrived later in the evening, accompanied by several policemen, and recommended, after viewing the remains, that they be laid upon a lounge until the morrow, when he would impanel a jury, and render a verdict.

He also ordered that two policemen remain at the cottage, to see that Mrs. Blair or her daughter made no attempt to escape.

This action on his part, caused the ladies much uneasiness, but Dick and Horace Henshaw finally succeeded in quieting their fears, by assuring them that it was merely a part of the official's duty.

Henshaw offered to remain with the officers and watch over the dead; so, late in the evening Dick sought his room and retired for the night.

His bed stood along the side of the room, against the wall, where a door had been cut through, communicating with an adjoining room.

Dick took good care to see that this door was locked, and the key on his own side of the door.

He did not fall asleep at once. His mind was too active, and kept reviewing the incidents that had occurred during his first day in Galveston.

It was not over an hour after he had retired

when he heard some one enter the adjoining chamber, which, according to Mrs. Blair, was occupied by Gil Morey.

Now, however, there were evidently two persons, for Dick heard voices in conversation, and impelled by curiosity, softly changed his position in bed, so that his ear came in close contiguity to the keyhole.

What he heard gradually developed to be interesting.

"Well, the old man's dead," the voice of Harry Henshaw said.

"Yes. I've been looking for this result for some time," Gil Morey's falsetto voice replied. "I'm not surprised in the least, you know."

"What do you mean by 'this result'?"

Morey laughed.

"Can't you guess?" he said. "I thought you were more up to snuff."

"Why surely you do not mean to intimate—"

"But, I do, though. Old Blair was neither a fool nor crazy, and clung onto life as tenaciously as a leech, even if he did have consumption!"

"But I cannot believe that Mrs. Blair would—"

"Oh! believe that Mrs. Blair would or would not, just as you like. It's none of your business, nor mine, anyhow. I'll wager you a new hat, though, that ten thousand dollars is a big temptation for any one, and I'll do even better; I'll bet you a gold watch that Mrs. B—— is Mrs. Henshaw inside of a fortnight, my dear boy!"

"Bah! nonsense. My old man ain't so foolish as to get married again."

"Don't you fret yourself. Your old man's smart enough to pull in all the boodle he can get his hands on, and don't you forget it. I've known how things have been working, for a long time, and you can bet you are booked for a new mother-in-law."

"Well, if that's the case, I could look further and fare worse. It won't matter a row of pins to me, either way. The more money the old man makes, the more I can draw on him for. See?"

"Ha! ha! yes. You're in luck to have a dad to draw on. By the way, you said you had received a notice of a meeting?"

"Yes. To-morrow night, at the usual hour, usual place, I suppose."

"Got any idea what business is to be transacted?"

"No, I only got a second's interview with the captain. Must be something of importance, likely, for a full attendance is desired."

"I'll be there."

"Probably I shall, too," young Henshaw said. "And, by the way; Gil, I heard you got your mouth slapped to-night. How about that?"

"Well, I suppose it's true!" Morey growled. "I met Bethel walking along with that cur, Bristol, whom your old man gave us an introduction to, and I tried to get her to leave him and come with me, when he up and unexpectedly slapped me across the mouth!"

"What did you do?"

"What did I do? Why, I knocked him down, of course, and would have broken his head, only Bethel begged me to let up on him!"

"Oh! come off, Gil! What are you trying to give us? You didn't touch the fellow at all, but sneaked off like a whipped cur!"

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" cried Morey, fiercely.

"Look out! don't you call me a liar!"

"I didn't say you was, but I do say that whoever told you that lied, infamously!"

"Well, I got my information from those who saw the whole thing, and they're the boys who won't lie unless there's a big pot on the board!"

"Who do you mean?"

"Oh! the gang—such sellers as Bill Little, Barker, Hen Mitchell and Reddy, the tough. They wⁿt the only ones who saw you, either. Fred Warden and Morris Shannon saw it, too, and enjoyed it immensely!"

"Oh! dry up! It's a lie. They've been stuffin' you because you're so gullible. Why, I'm going to challenge the fellow to fight to a finish, to-morrow. Be careful how you give away names. That fellow may have the next room, for what we know, and there's no telling who or what he is!"

"You ought to be able to tell something near what he is," Henshaw laughed. "But let that drop. I must be going now. I may catch on to some luck before I sleep."

"Humph! not much likelihood of it, I guess. How much money have you got?"

"Fifty."

"Let me have half."

"For what?"

"Because I want it."

"Confound it, so do I."

"That don't matter. Dare you refuse me?"

"Blamed if I don't."

"Well, try it on and see how you'll come out. There'll be a breeze stirred up in this town."

"Oh! well, here's the money. But I'm getting tired of this sort of business."

"I don't care a fig if you are," Morey replied. "When I call, you come to time. When you refuse, why, you come to grief."

"Maybe it will not long be thus," Harry retorted, and rising, he left the room.

While in the next room Deadwood Dick lay back upon his pillows and cogitated deeply over what he had heard.

"I wonder if I will be able to pick up any useful threads out of this conversation?" he mused. "Possibly I may have struck a lead that will pan out well. I hope so."

CHAPTER IV.

ENLIGHTENING THE WIDOW.

THE next forenoon the coroner's inquest over the remains of Benjamin Blair was held.

Aside from the coroner and his jury, there were few present, except the widow and her daughter, a couple of police, Deadwood Dick, Horace Henshaw, and a member of the local life insurance company.

The neighbors were generally excluded.

When called upon to testify, Mrs. Blair did so, substantially as follows:

She had been married to Benjamin Blair twenty-two years, and their married life had been unusually happy until within the past year, when her husband had to give up work, owing to weakness resulting from lingering consumption.

For a while Mr. Blair had had hopes of ultimate recovery, stated the witness, but finally he had to abandon all hope, and the matter preyed so heavily upon his mind that at times his mind wandered, and he knew not what he said or did.

These attacks came periodically, and during them the deceased was very violent and abusive. In his lucid intervals he always acted like his natural self.

His attack of yesterday had been of unusual violence, and had been followed by a fit, during which, suddenly drawing a knife, he stabbed himself through the heart before the witness could prevent him. She was all alone at the time of the tragedy, having previously sent her daughter for assistance.

When questioned in regard to the insurance on the life of her husband, she stated that he, being on the road much, had voluntarily taken out the policy, three years before, when he was in perfect health and sound of mind. Within the past year, she and her daughter had had to struggle hard to make money enough to meet the regular dues.

She was then cross-examined by the coroner, and again by the life insurance representative, but her statement remained the same.

Bethel then took the stand, told of her late father's attacks of insanity, and how, the afternoon before, he had threatened to murder them, and she had been sent to find their new boarder, Mr. Bristol, as they were afraid to remain alone.

Deadwood Dick testified to accompanying Bethel home and seeing the deceased lying upon the floor, in the same attitude the coroner had found him.

This closed the testimony, and the case was given to the jury, and they retired.

In a few minutes they returned, giving it as their opinion that the deceased came to his death by his own hand, during a fit of mental aberration, the instrument used being a dirk knife, and furthermore, that no blame was attached to any one, for the death.

The coroner then gave the widow an order on the city clerk for a burial permit, and this part of the business was over.

Benjamin Blair was buried the next day, Deadwood Dick bearing the funeral expenses, as the widow did not have sufficient means, until she should realize from the policy.

Horace Henshaw offered, also, to bear the expenses, but not until the new boarder's offer had been gratefully accepted.

And the lawyer seemed considerably put out about it, too, and immediately a change of demeanor toward Dick was noticeable.

The evening after the funeral, Dick, the widow and Bethel were seated upon the veranda of the cottage, silently watching the people upon the moonlit beach, when the detective broke the silence:

"Mrs. Blair," he said. "I suppose you do not know my business calling!"

"Indeed, I do not, sir. I never thought so far as to ask you."

"Well, you might as well know. I am a man-hunter, or, in other words, a detective!"

"A detective?"

"Ye, ma'am."

"Indeed. Why, you must be wonderfully smart to be a detective, for I've often read they were the shrewdest of the shrewd!"

"Well, not always," Dick laughed. "There are some regular blockheads in the business. Up in the territories I'm well known, and have been quite successful. I came here to attend to one job, and it may be that I shall have more than that to look after, through merest chance. By the way, I want to ask you a couple of questions. You can use your own judgment about answering them."

"Very well, sir; I shall certainly be very glad to answer them, if possible. What is it you wish to know?"

"The first is: Have you ever entertained any idea of marrying Horace Henshaw, in event of your first husband's death?"

"Marry Horace Henshaw? Merciful stars, no! What ever put that idea into your head?"

"In regard to that, more, anon. My second question is: Have you surrendered your insurance policy to Henshaw for collection?"

"No, sir, not as yet! He has not asked for it!"

"Well, when he comes for it, don't you give it to him!"

"Why not, sir?"

"Because I believe that man to be a consummate villain, that's why!"

"Oh! Mr. Bristol! Why, how can you say such a thing of Mr. Henshaw? He has been a very good friend to us, and he is the very soul of honor, I am sure!"

"You may think so, but I am in a position to assure you that I know better. His seeming kindness has not been without a mercenary object. My first suspicion was confirmed when I heard him say to you it would cost considerable to collect the money on that policy. I immediately scented a lawyer's trick to make money out of you; but, prior to all this, the day of my arrival here, while you were preparing a lunch for me, your husband came into the parlor, and demanded to know who I was, and who had sent me.

"Of course I told him, and he at once denounced Henshaw to be a scheming villain, saying that he was only waiting for him (your husband) to die, in order that he might marry you and get a part of the insurance money. I paid no attention to your husband, and he went out."

"I was set to thinking, however, and when I heard Henshaw say it would be costly to collect the insurance, and to intimate that he was the only man who could successfully do it, I foresaw a scheme for sordid gain, and resolved to watch matters."

"Later, that same night, I overheard a conversation between two persons, and one of them averred that it was his opinion that you murdered your husband, in order that you might be free to marry Henshaw. He further offered to bet that you would be Mrs. H., within two weeks' time, and that Henshaw would come in for a good share of the ten thousand."

"Merciful Heaven! I cannot believe all this you are telling me, Mr. Bristol!" the widow cried, wringing her hands, hysterically. "You must be out of your head!"

While Bethel drew her chair near to the boarder, and gazed wonderingly up into his face.

"No, I'm not quite on the crazy list, yet!" Dick replied, with a light laugh. "What I have told you, you can rely on as gospel truth. I have not quite got onto the full details of Henshaw's scheme, but I do know that he intends to get part, if not all of that insurance money. If one plan fails, I suspect he intends to force you to marry him!"

"Force me to marry him? Never!"

"Say not so. If he were to be prepared to produce witnesses to swear that you deliberately murdered your husband, you'd marry him before you'd hang, eh?"

The widow uttered a terrified gasp, and sunk back in her chair, too weak to speak.

"I don't say this is his plan, mind you," Dick went on, "but I am sure he is capable of just such devilishness, as a last resort to secure his aim."

"His first plan will be to secure the policy, get the money on it, and deduct a large sum for himself, telling you it cost that amount to secure the collection."

"But will it not cost a large amount?"

"Certainly not—but a very few dollars at the most. I took it upon myself to interview the insurance directors to-day, which I was able to do, being a government detective, and I was assured that the full policy would be honored, on presentation."

"So that, instead of allowing that rascal several thousands for making the collection, you can go and draw the full amount yourself."

"May God bless you, Mr. Bristol, for this great revelation. But for you I should be the victim of a diabolical conspiracy. Years ago, I refused to marry Horace Henshaw, but I never believed he would ever again wish me to marry him. Oh, the villain! Wait until I see him!"

"You will probably have a chance to-morrow, but you must treat him as usual until he has fully made his terms and conditions, then open up your vials of wrath upon him; and, too, I must secretly overhear the interview!"

"It shall be as you wish, sir. And could you not draw the money on the policy? I am not much of a business woman, and should hate to face those great men."

"By your sending a sealed order to them, directing that the payment be made to me, I presume I should have no difficulty. But, how do you know but what, after I got the money, I'd skip out with it?"

"Never fear. A man who would, unasked, do so much for utter strangers, as you have done for us, I would trust with my life. Wouldn't you, Bethel?"

"Yes, indeed!" Bethel said, blushing prettily.

"Well then, in the morning, I'll try and get the money, and get back in time for Henshaw's visit. Just when he's beginning to get exasperated, I'll walk into the parlor and give you the money. That will cap the climax, and I'll bet a dollar he'll grab his hat, and take a quiet sneak, you see!"

And Dick laughed heartily over his victory.

"You are a very smart young man," Mrs. Blair said, admiringly. "Any mother could be proud of such a son as you. Are you parents living?"

"No!" Dick replied sadly. "Both are dead, these several years, since when I have been a waif of the Wild West. Both my parents came to violent deaths, at the instance of a human wretch, who afterward suffered the full measure of my vengeance. But, it is unpleasant to speak of such things and so we will drop the subject."

Later in the evening, Gil Morey came upon the veranda, evidently considerably the worse for drink.

"Mrs. Blair?" he said, steadying himself.

"Well, Mr. Morey?"

"How long have I been a guest of your house? Please to tell me."

"Very near a year, sir."

"You've always been paid prompt, eh?"

"Yes."

"Always minded my own business, ain't I?"

"Why certainly."

"Thought a good deal of Bethel, ain't I?"

"Why you should be the best judge of that."

"Well, I loved the girl, but she's gone back on me, and I'm goin' away."

"Well, I'm sorry for that."

"Guess you will be, for all the other boarders is going to leave you."

"Indeed! For what reason?"

"'Cause you don't fire this chap. We don't cotton to him for a cent, and if you don't bounce him we're goin' to leave!"

"Then, you can leave, sir!" the widow cried,

"and the sooner the better. This gentleman is a welcome guest to my house!"

"You won't bounce him, then?"

"Certainly not!"

"Lose all your boarders!"

"It's immaterial. I intend to give up keeping boarders, anyhow!"

"Won't bounce him, then!—last time!"

"No! I tell you!"

"Then, by thunder we will. Hurrah, boys, this way!"

In answer to his call, a number of dusky figures came running up the lawn!

CHAPTER V.

TWO BAFFLED SCOUNDRELS.

It at once became evident to Deadwood Dick that Morey had come prepared to wreak a summary vengeance.

The hour was quite late, and there were few persons in the neighborhood to offer any interposition, in case of an assault or murder.

This fact did not cause the man from the Wild West to quail, however.

He was upon his feet in an instant, when he saw that danger menaced him, and gave Morey a push that sent him tumbling off the veranda,

at the same time ordering the widow and Bethel to go into the house.

Then two revolvers leaped into his grasp, and he stepped boldly to the edge of the veranda.

"Back there, you cowards!" he cried, in a peremptory tone. "The first man who attempts to come up here, dies with his boots on, and the rest of you follow suit. I've got twelve bullets in these pops—one for each of you—and I never miss. So if you're lookin' around for a funeral, you've struck the right locality. I'll take a contract of laying out each and every one of you in less than twenty seconds or forfeit my right to the name of Deadwood Dick!"

When they saw the gleaming weapons, and heard Dick's ringing voice, the gang came to a halt, and listened. Evidently they were unarmed, for they exhibited no other weapons than their fists.

And a hard-looking crowd they were, as a whole.

Gil Morey, who had recovered his equilibrium, after his headlong plunge from the veranda, now turned and shook his fist at Dick, savagely.

"Come down here, you dirty dog!" he roared, "and I'll lick you, myself!"

"You can't lick a cat!" Dick retorted; "nor is there any need of my coming down there. You evidently called to pay me your respects; so come and see me, all at once, and discover how suddenly you'll forget what was your errand. Don't be at all bashful, but do come!"

Morey turned upon his party, fiercely.

"At him, curse you!" he yelled. "Will you let one man bluff you? At the loafer, I say!"

"Oi reckon if yez want 'em bad, you'll have to throt up and git 'em yerself!" spoke up a burly Irishman. "Shure its seven children at home as can't very well spare the loikes ov Corduroy Peter, at meal hour!"

And the crowd of one accord gave a cry of approval—all except Gil Morey, whose indignation was only intensified.

"You're a pack of cowardly asses, and you'll not get a red cent out of me! Begone with you!"

"Nary time, me bucko!" roared Corduroy Pete. "We're the boys as is right here, an' be-gorra if yez don't pony up the hundred dollars ye promised us, we'll be afther givin' yez the same dose we was goin' to give ther b'yee wid the shooters!"

This was evidently a "reasoner," for Morey at once began to search through his pockets.

Then, he turned nearly as white as his immaculate shirt front.

The money was gone!

He had possessed over a hundred dollars, when he set out to wreak revenge on Deadwood Dick.

"By heaven! boys, I've lost the money!" he gasped, trembling from very fear. "Wait a moment. It must have dropped from my pocket, when I fell off the plateau!"

He took a step toward the veranda, then—

"Back!" shouted Deadwood Dick. "Another step and you cross the dead-line!"

"But, I want to find my money!" whined Morey.

"Stop right where you are. All moneys lost upon these premises belongs to the proprietress!"

"Shure! that's what's the matter, boys!" roared Corduroy Pete. "Seize the spaldeen, an' muzzle his mug, so he can't speake! Shure, we'll larn him a lesson, fer thryin' to shut our eye up for a hundred dollars!"

"For the love of God! have mercy!" Morey cried, dropping upon his knees, and up-raising his hands, imploringly.

But, no attention was paid to his pleading. He was seized and borne away, a brawny hand being clapped over his mouth, to prevent his making any outcry.

"Oh! what are they going to do with him?" asked Mrs. Blair, who, with Bethel, came out upon the veranda, as the crowd was departing.

"Oh! they're going to give him a taste of the treatment he had planned out for me," Dick explained.

"And what was that, pray?"

"I am not certain, but I suspect it was tar and feathers!"

"Oh! my! won't that be awful!"

"Serve him right. They'd have given me the dose if they had caught me."

"My! but, how brave you were, to face all those men!" It was Bethel who spoke.

"Oh, that was mere fun!" Dick assured her. "I knew they wouldn't dare tackle me! I've faced far worse crowds than that!"

A search was made and Morey's hundred dollars were found.

"I'll keep this, and give it to him, the next time we meet!" Dick said. "Rascal though he is, I cannot help pitying him, if they really do give him a coat. Perhaps it will learn him a lesson to go about his own business in the future!"

A next morning's paper contained the following:

ARRESTED:—A man was found skulking through the streets, with no other clothing than a coat of tar and feathers. His appearance was truly shocking. Officer Bell took him to the station-house, where it was found he was a detective of the city force. Two officers were set to work cleaning him up, and if his skin is tough, he will probably be ship-shape in a day or so. He positively refuses to give the particulars of how he came in such a predicament."

As may be supposed, Morey was not seen upon the street that day.

Dick arose at an early hour, and after a hearty breakfast, took a long walk, and returned in time to visit the insurance office; so, armed with the policy, and an order from Mrs. Blair, he proceeded to the company's place of business and requested to see the president to whom he presented the order and the policy.

"It is not customary to pay money to any one except the person named upon the policy," the president observed, "except to lawyers employed by policy-holders. However, as this order is so drawn that it makes you Mrs. Blair's attorney, we will make an exception in this case, presuming it is all right as we are relieved from responsibility after the money passes from our hands to her properly accredited agent."

Dick was then introduced to the cashier, and shortly afterward, was on his way back to the Blair cottage, with the money safe in his possession.

Of course Mrs. Blair and Bethel were overjoyed to learn of Dick's success, and complimented him in warmest terms.

Horace Henshaw at that moment was ushered into the parlor.

Dick and Bethel were stationed in the adjoining room, where they could overhear everything, the door being slightly ajar.

When Mrs. Blair entered the parlor, Henshaw arose, and greeted her effusively.

"My dear Mrs. Blair, I am so glad to see you looking so well and cheerful!" he said. "I had grave fears that the blow caused by your husband's tragic fate, would utterly prostrate you."

"Oh! no. On the contrary, I am feeling quite well, thank you."

"Yes? Well, Mrs. Blair, I have called on a matter of considerable importance, namely, the insurance. I have had a talk with the directors, and have consulted with all the lawyers in the city, and I must confess matters look rather uncertain. The directors are willing to settle, through me, as a mere matter of accommodation, for half the amount, or five thousand dollars.

"I am not in favor of such a settlement, believing by fighting in the courts, I can get the full amount. My brother lawyers tell me I'm a fool for thinking of trying it. In one sense they are right, for if I should lose, it would be a dampener on my reputation. But, owing to my profound admiration—ay love—for you, Belle—"

"Mr. Henshaw!"

"Nay, do not interrupt me, for you might as well hear the truth now, as at another time. You know I loved you twenty-three years ago, but you rejected me. My love has increased a hundred-fold, since then, and I want you for my wife! Marry me, and I will kneel in very worship at your shrine!"

"Mr. Henshaw, this is no time to speak of such matters, and you cannot have much respect for me or you would not speak of such a thing, so soon after my husband's death!"

"Pardon me, Belle, if I have offended you, but, really, I could not help it. I want to make sure that you are mine, and then I would be content. The marriage need not necessarily be made public for six months, and you could live in your own house. All I want to know is that you are mine."

"Now, listen, Belle, and be sensible. I am the only man who can get you your rights. But for me, you probably would never get a penny on that policy. The company is willing to make concessions to me, not to you."

"I am satisfied I can get eight thousand for you, by expending a few hundred out of my own pocket, which I should not mind in doing to secure you your rights, in case you were willing to use me square."

"Now, Belle, don't you think you could marry me, if I go to all this trouble in your behalf?"

"No, sir, I cannot marry you! I shall never marry again!"

"But, consider, Belle. You know I love you;—indeed, you must marry me!"

"Must! Horace Henshaw? That to me?"

"That to you! You are no more than any other woman, except to me. It is absolutely necessary for you to marry me in order to receive a penny of that insurance."

"I fail to see how, sir!"

"Because I have enough influence with the company to prevent the claim being paid!" the villain declared, triumphantly.

"Well, I guess not, Mister Hawk. I reckon I have got something to say about that."

It was a commanding voice that uttered the words, and a cool young man, who stepped into the room.

Henshaw started, and looked wicked enough when he saw the young detective.

"Well, what have you got to say about it?" he demanded.

"This much," Dick replied, "that your services are not needed. I have already collected for Mrs. Blair the full amount of the policy, and your little money-making and matrimonial scheme is teetotally knocked in the head. Your conspiracy to get Mrs. Blair and her money into your power has failed. So the best thing for you to do is to take a quiet skip."

"Yes, go! you unprincipled scoundrel!" the widow cried, "and never dare to show your face here again."

Henshaw stood glaring from one to the other, purple with rage.

"Curses on you both," cried he. "So, this is the reward for my kindness? But, wait! My revenge is yet to come, Belle Blair. I shall force you to marry me, whether you will or not. You'll find you have a demon to deal with now. As for you, you young desperado, you had better never have been born than to have come to Galveston. Remember!"

And the baffled man left the house, fury incarnate depicted in his face.

CHAPTER VI.

THE "GHOULS" TALK BUSINESS.

DICK had somehow lost all notion of trying to hunt for the alleged grave-robbers, since Horace Henshaw had turned out to be a rogue, and he much preferred to lounge upon the piazza at Blair Cottage, in the sunshine of Bethel's smile.

They were gradually becoming more intimate, a fact that did not escape the widow's eye, as she looked on with demure approval.

Dick and Bethel were frequently seen out driving along the beach, and the handsome frontier ferret, as well as his pretty companion, attracted no little attention.

Dick and an elderly Southern gentleman were the only boarders remaining at the cottage, and a pleasant little party they made.

One afternoon, when Bethel was too busied to sit upon the piazza, Dick decided to hire a rig and drive out to the cemetery, where the late Mr. Blair was buried. He had some curiosity to see whether the grave had been disturbed or not; for there had been a heavy rain immediately after the burial, and it naturally must have left its impressions on the mound, and would readily show if the place had been disturbed since.

He reached the cemetery, and greatly to his indignation, saw unmistakable signs that it had been tampered with quite recently.

The dirt was freshly piled up, and had not been raised upon since it had been disturbed.

A man was working among the graves, near at hand, and Dick called him over.

"Are you aware that this grave has been tampered with, sir?" he demanded.

"Shure, an' I don't know nothin' 'bout it, sor."

"Do you work about the cemetery?"

"Every day, sor."

"Did you dig this grave?"

"I think not, sor. It's Denny McCarty as dug it."

"Where is he now?"

"He's off on a dhrunk, bad 'cess to him, an' there's plenty of wurruk to be done."

"How old does this grave look to be?"

"It looks as if it moight have been filled in yesterday, sor."

"But it wasn't; that grave was occupied on Tuesday last, before the heavy rain."

"Thin some one has been diggin' at it, sor."

"That's what I say. Patrick, I want that grave opened."

"Ye'll have to get a permit, sor. I've no right to tick a grave, sor, without a permit."

"I'll attend to that. I am a detective, and

will be responsible. Get down to work now, and it will be five dollars in your pocket."

Five dollars was the very thing Pat wanted that very day, and after looking around the cemetery to see that no one was near at hand, he set rapidly to work.

The ground was loose and loamy, and it was not long ere the sturdy Irishman had the dirt all off the rough coffin-box.

"Now raise the lid of the box," Dick ordered, "for I see that the screws have been removed."

Pat did so, and lo and behold, the box was empty!

The inside coffin and its occupant were gone!

"As I suspected," Dick cried. "Another piece of work of the Ghouls of Galveston."

He waited until the Irishman had filled up the grave, and then, tendering him a five-dollar note, looked the man sternly in the face.

"There, sir, is the pay for your labor. Now, then, I want you to tell me who robbed that grave!"

"Shure, an' how am I to do that, when I do not know meself, at all? I didn't know it was robbed until yez called my attintion to it."

"Don't lie!"

"Shure, I'm not lyin'."

"Do you know what a detective is?"

"Faith, an' I do, sor."

"What's your name?"

"Paddy Doogan, sor."

"Well, Doogan, I don't see but what I shall have to take you in."

"Och! an' phat for, sor? Didn't yez tell me if I opened the grave, ye'd make it all right, sor?"

"Oh! I don't refer to that. I think you know more about this grave-robbing business than you are willing to admit."

"Indeed I do not, sor, whin I only come on in the mornin' at siven, and go off at six. Begorra, it's not the loikes of me ye'd catch around here after dark!"

"But you must see some tough characters around here."

"Oh, I catch a tramp onc't in a while, a shlapin' off a drunk, but I prods him with me pick, an' he ginerally gits up and gits! There's only one really bad man I ever sees around here, an' he's bad to the core. He watches ivery funeral as comes here, sor, an' whenever the bloody thafe gits a chance, he stales the flowers off the graves, an' he skips out. I've got on to him, sor, an' he foights shy av me, yez can bet."

"What is his name?"

"Indade, an' I don't know, sir. I never found out!"

Satisfied that nothing more was to be learned of the Irishman, Dick returned to the city.

Whether it would be advisable to break the news of his discovery to the city authorities, or not, he didn't know.

He was also undecided whether to tell Mrs. Blair or not.

At the cottage he found the widow in a very perturbed state of mind.

"Oh! Mr. Bristol, such terrible news has come since you have been gone!" she said, "and I have been nearly worried to death!"

"Why, what is the matter?" Dick queried.

"Oh! I cannot tell you, sir, but, if you will read this you can see for yourself!"

She handed Dick a letter, which he unfolded and perused.

It ran as follows:

"To THE WIDOW BLAIR, GALVESTON:—

"MADAM:—You are perhaps unaware, as are most other people, that there exists in this city an organization known as the Ghouls, who prey upon local and other cemeteries, for means of earning a livelihood, rather than beg or starve. The various devices of this organization for making a dollar, could neither please or entertain you, if explained. Therefore, we have but need to say this: It having come to our notice that you have recently come into a snug sum of money, and we deeming it incumbent on you to cater to the comfort of your fellow-creatures, have seen fit to remove your husband's remains from the grave and secrete them in a safe place, there to await redemption.

"Presuming you will want the body back, we have fixed the charge of redemption at the modest price of \$2,000, which amount is to be paid in one hundred-dollar bills. Come alone to-night at 2 A. M., to the strip of beach at the extreme eastern end of the island, and pay to a person who will suddenly appear before you, the sum above named. Within forty-eight hours afterwar', you will find your husband's remains exactly where they were buried.

"Particular attention should be paid to the clause about coming alone! Any attempt on your part to have spies or detectives in the vicinity, will be frustrated, for no one will appear to receive the money, and your husband's remains will be destroyed, and you will never hear from us again. We know our biz, and we mean biz. If you want back the stiff, you must go according to the directions herein contained. If you fail, also, to appear at the appointed

hour, that settles all. You are watched, and there will be no sense or use of trying to beat us at our own game. So consider and act.

"Yours truly,

SCAVENGER,
Chief of the Ghouls.

"N. B.—Come as yourself, unvailed and without any attempt at disguise. A word to the wise is sufficient."

This extraordinary communication was written in a very peculiar style of chirography, a fact that did not escape Deadwood Dick's attention.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Mrs. Blair asked—she having been studying Deadwood Dick's inscrutable countenance anxiously.

"Oh, I am not particularly surprised," was the reply.

"Not surprised! Why not, pray?"

"Because I made the discovery, this afternoon, that your husband's grave had been robbed!"

"Good Heaven! Then it is really true! I could not bring myself to believe it!"

"I am sorry to say it is indeed true. Some strange impulse caused me to go to the cemetery to-day, and I saw at once that the grave had been disturbed. I had it opened, and found that the body was gone, and the coffin, also!"

"Oh, dear! this is terrible! Who could ever have thought that my poor husband's remains would not be allowed to remain in their tomb?"

"It is sad, I know, but I would not take it so much to heart, if I were you, Mrs. Blair. You are not the first sufferer, I am led to understand. This desecration of graves has been going on for months, but the police have kept the matter hushed up, in hopes of capturing the culprits. Finally, Horace Henshaw sent for me, and put me on the case."

"Horace Henshaw did?"

"Yes. He claimed to have had a loss—all the silver trimmings having been removed from the coffin of his niece. Have you ever heard him speak about it?"

"I know he had a niece, who died at his house, but that's all. He never mentioned anything of the sort you have been telling me about."

"Was his niece's body shipped East?"

"Not that I know of. It was buried in the Henshaw plot at the cemetery."

"It wasn't first placed in the vault, then?"

"Oh, no! I was at the funeral, and saw the body buried."

Dick scratched his head, and tried hard to suppress a look of the surprise he felt.

"I wonder what Henshaw's object was in lying to me?" he mused.

Mrs. Blair continued:

"Mr. Bristol, what am I to do in this matter? Am I to give up two thousand dollars to these horrid men? I rely upon you to tell me what to do."

"Do nothing until I have time to think the matter over. There's plenty of time to get ready. Before I take any action in the matter, I want to consult with the chief of police. I will return before dark, and then we will consult together as to what is the best action to take."

"Very well. I must have my husband's body back, if it costs twice two thousand dollars."

"I shall try to arrange it so that you will not have to expend a cent!" Dick said, as he took his departure, taking the Ghoul's letter with him.

He made his way direct to the office of the chief of police, and presented this card:

RICHARD BRISTOL,

(*Deadwood Dick, Jr.*)

U. S. GOVERNMENT DETECTIVE.

The chief of police was a rotund little man, of jolly disposition, and after glancing from the card to his visitor, put out his hand, heartily.

"Bristol, I am glad to see you!" he said. "Help yourself to a seat. I don't know that I ever met you before, but I am glad to see you. What brings you to Galveston?—ah! I remember, now. My secretary sent for you, at the instance of—let me see—"

"Horace Henshaw," Dick finished.

"Ah! yes, exactly. I was busy at the time when Mr. Henshaw called, so I referred him to my secretary. Well, I suppose you have seen Henshaw?"

"I have. I called here, on my arrival in town, and your secretary referred me to Henshaw."

"I presume, accordingly, that Henshaw has let you into this grave-robbing business?"

"He has."

"What do you think of it?"

"I was greatly surprised that such a business should be systematically carried on. I have

often heard of grave-robberies, but never before heard of such an evil being carried on as a business."

"Well, it is an undisputed fact that a gang does exist in this city or vicinity who make grave-robbing a business. We have kept the matter hushed up, in hopes we could find out who the guilty parties were, but so far we have learned nothing. My men are about as sharp a lot as there is in any western city, but they have failed to get on to these human scavengers, just the same!"

"Have you no suspicions who the parties may be?" Dick asked.

"Well, no. We have had a watch kept on different suspicious characters, but have not been able to prove anything against them. Have you made any discoveries, sir?"

"Well, yes!"

And Dick handed him the letter Mrs. Blair had received from the Ghouls.

The chief read it, and gave vent to a whistle of astonishment.

"Well I'll be thumped if this don't beat my time!" he ejaculated. "These fellows, whoever they are, appear to be growing mighty bold!"

"I should say so. They're playing a large hand!"

"So they are. Does Mrs. Blair propose to pay the money?"

"I presume she would, if I were to allow her to, but I do not intend to do that, by any means."

"Well, according to this letter, if something is not done the body will be destroyed."

"Pooh! don't you believe that! That's only a bluff. These infernal sharks think they've got a soft snap, and they'll hold the body until they get their price—that is, providing they don't get nabbed. I intend to visit the appointed place, to-night, in the guise of Mrs. Blair."

"You do?" incredulously.

"Certainly. I'm quite a dandy at disguising myself, and can make-up so that Mrs. Blair would scarcely believe the evidence of her senses."

"But, what is your object, unless you pay over the money?"

"I intend to capture the man who comes to receive the money. Maybe, I'll get left, but if I do, it won't make any difference. Is there any high point, within spy-glass distance of the spot named in that letter?"

The chief reflected a moment.

"Yes, I believe there is," he replied. "There is a house, I have in mind, with a cupola, which overlooks that part of the beach. Why?"

"Well, I want you to station a man there, keen of sight, and with a powerful glass, to watch the proceedings of to-night. From present indications, it will be bright moonlight, at two A. M., and your man will have no difficulty in watching what transpires. If I don't succeed in capturing my game, it is possible I'll get done up, myself. In the latter event, the watch can form some idea of where my antagonist goes. See?"

"Yes. A pretty good idea, sir, and you shall have my hearty co-operation. I will have a man on duty, at the point named, and a couple of good men near by, whom he can dispatch to your aid, at a moment's notice, if necessary. You will go armed, I suppose."

"Oh! certainly. And, now, I have some names, here, that I accidentally got hold of, and I want to see if you are posted as to the characters of the parties?"

"Most likely I am, for I know pretty near every man in Galveston."

Dick took a memorandum-book from his pocket, and began:

"First, Gilbert Morey?"

"A detective on our force, and a good one, too."

"Any bad habits?"

"Not that I am aware of!"

"Got tar-and-feathered, didn't he?"

"How do you know?"

"Oh! I heard something about it. He took a dislike to me, and brought a gang of roughs to do the act to me. I held them at bay, with a pair of 'sixes,' and then he refused to pay the men, and they rushed him off, and used him as they intended to use me!"

"Indeed? Well, really, this is the first light I have had thrown on the subject. But, go on."

"Next, Harry Henshaw!"

"Son of Horace, and a pretty fast young man, although I don't know as there is anything against him, otherwise."

"Bill Little?"

"He's pretty fair sort of a chap, when sober, but when full, he's always looking for a scrape."

"Barker?"

"Barker?—let me see. Oh! yes, I know him. He's sort of a rounder!"

"Hen Mitchell?"

"One of the notorious Mitchell brothers—Hen and Frank. They're in police court, once in awhile, and are pretty tough nuts, anyhow."

"Reddy, the tough?"

"He's a bad one. If I was on the bench, and he came before me, I'd give him a year. He's one of the gang you have mentioned!"

"How about Fred Warden and Morris Shannon?"

"Habitual chair-warmers. Oh! there's a clique of those fellows who always hang together, and never do anything, but somehow manage to pinch out a living."

"Where do they hang out?"

"Down on M— street, at a place run by a man named Jerry McMugg. It's a pretty tough hole, and I've threatened to have it pulled, several times, but, somehow, have never got around to it!"

"Does Morey associate with this crowd?"

"Yes, he does, but only to keep an eye on them, and see that they ain't up to mischief. Oh! I tell you, Morey's sharp, and he knows what he's about, all the time!"

"He might be clever at running down a cat, but further than that, I wouldn't give a cent a pound for his whole carcass!" Dick replied, rising. "If you've got any golden opinions of that fellow, I would confidentially advise you to sell them at once to the highest bidder, cheap."

"But that is neither here nor there. You will have a man on watch as I suggested?"

"You can rely upon it."

"And this interview is to be strictly confidential?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. You can bet your last stakes that, within a fortnight, I will capture enough evidence to break up this grave-robbing business!"

"I hope so, sir. You seem to have plenty of ambition and go-aheaditiveness, and a man with those qualities generally succeeds. Rest assured that any aid I can give you will be cheerfully furnished."

"Thank you. I hope to have these men in your custody soon, and if I succeed, my success will be my only reward."

"Don't be too sure of that," the chief replied. "If you are successful, there are men in this city who would voluntarily make you up a handsome purse!"

"It is not required," Dick declared, and he took his departure.

CHAPTER VII.

THE AFTER MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW.

DEADWOOD DICK left the office of the chief of police in deep thought.

"I am not quite sure," he mused, "but somehow it hits me pretty hard that I am getting gradually closer to the trail," and the next thing he did was to strike a drug store, and examine a Directory.

The address he looked for was that of Jerry McMugg, and found it. That of Gil Morey was not to be given.

In coming to Galveston, Dick had neglected to bring disguises with him, and aware that he could not do without them, he spent the remainder of the day in collecting such a supply as he thought he might require.

He then returned to the cottage.

Mrs. Blair was still pale and nervous, and Bethel also looked greatly distressed.

"Mr. Bristol, what am I to do in regard to this matter?" the widow anxiously asked. "I am near worried to death about it."

"You, personally, are to do nothing," Dick replied, "and I should advise you not to worry. I propose to interview the man who comes for the money to-night, myself, and if not greatly mistaken, I shall capture him and force him to reveal the hiding-place of your husband's remains."

"But how are you to see this person? You remember what the letter says?"

"I do, but that does not matter. I am somewhat of an adept at disguising myself, and if you will loan me one of your dresses, I propose to visit the beach, a pretty fair counterpart of yourself!"

This brought a smile to Mrs. Blair's face.

"Why, Mr. Bristol! How can you do this? I am sure you would be detected!"

"That remains to be seen. It won't be the first time I have played a female part, successfully. Before midnight a new Mrs. Blair will be ready for the part of the drama to be enacted."

"Well, Mr. Bristol, I hope you will succeed

but I shall be greatly surprised, if you do, and more than grateful. I have procured a full mourning outfit, and shall place it at your disposal, providing it will fit you."

"I guess we can make it fit," Dick replied, with a laugh. "You can leave it in my room, and, later in the evening, I will prepare myself for the adventure. Before, however, I make this venture, I shall visit a certain resort in this city, in the guise of an old "vet" miner. You will see how well I can make up, after I have done with supper!"

Supper over, Dick quietly retired to his room, and "made up" as the theatrical term goes.

When he had put on the finishing touches, he did indeed represent a veteran of the days of '49—wrinkled, tanned, white-haired, and feeble, and ragged; a veritable embodiment of hard usage and hard luck.

The advantage of one window of his room was that it opened upon the roof on one of the wings of the cottage, from which to the ground was but a slight jump.

By this route, he successfully made his way to the cottage grounds, and knocked at the kitchen door.

Mrs. Blair answered the summons, and surveyed the seeming tramp suspiciously.

"If you please, mum," said Dick, in a tremulous voice, "would it be askin' too much of you to give me a piece of bread and butter? I've traveled a good smart ways, and am mighty hungry, you can bet. I haven't any money, but I have a nugget of gold in my pocket, and as soon as I kin dispose of it, I'll come back an' settle wi' ye!"

"That is not necessary," Mrs. Blair replied. "Sit down on the steps, and I will see what I can pick up for you. Had you come a little sooner, I would have given you something warm to eat."

Dick accordingly sat down upon the steps, and, in a few minutes, the good widow reappeared with a plate of lunch, composed of tempting cold meats, biscuits, butter, and a dish of berries.

"Here, my man," she said, "is the best I can do for you. If you are really hungry, it may satisfy you. Have you traveled far?"

"Yes'm; all the way from Deadwood Dickville. Sorry, mum, but this hyer fodder ain't up to my standard. If yer ain't got no better'n this, why ye kin take it back. I'm purty particular what I eat, an' this yere stuff is rank!"

"Well! what impudence!" Mrs. Blair exclaimed, in astonishment. "Give me that plate, sir, and get off these premises, instantly, or I will have you arrested!"

Whereupon, Dick laughed in his natural way, and removed the false beard from his face.

"I don't believe you would have me arrested, would you, Mrs. Blair?" he said.

"Well, Mr. Bristol!" the widow exclaimed. "Of all things wonderful! Is it really you?"

"Slightly!" Dick replied.

"But, how did you get out of the house without us seeing you?"

"Oh, I came down by the air line," was the answer, with a nod toward the roof of the wing. "I'm off, now, for a little matter of investigation, but will be back in time for the meeting on the beach."

"Well, I hope you will succeed, Mr. Bristol, but pray be careful. There are a great many bad men in Galveston."

"No doubt of that, but I guess I can handle myself all right."

He then took his departure.

It was some little distance to the neighborhood of McMugg's saloon, but the detective arrived there, in due time, and found himself the inmate of a low-ceilinged grogery, whose very air seemed pregnant with evil.

McMugg, himself, a red-headed and decidedly tough-looking customer, presided behind the bar, along which were ranged a group of his patrons, who were in all respects as bad-looking as himself.

Some other of the inmates were seated at the various tables scattered about, but these fellows were several grades more respectable-looking than those before the bar.

Dick "sized-up" the crowd at a glance, and then walked up to the bar, and said:

"Stranger, I'm dry, and want suthin' ter wet my whistle with. D'y'e keep or slate?"

"No, I don't kape no slate!" McMugg retorted, gruffly. "Thar's no tick around this shebang, so you'd better pick 'n'p your heels and clear out."

"Well, I guess not, Petey. Reckon yer keeps yer stuff ter sell, don't ye?"

"I do, you bet!"

"Waal, pervidin' I wants a drink, I kin get it, can't I?"

"Not unless you show up the pay fer it."

"Waal, I guess I kin do that," Dick replied. "I hain't roughed it since 'forty-nine, fer nothin'. Jest set forth ther hornet juice, an' we'll all hev a hummer," and Dick laid a twenty-dollar gold-piece upon the counter.

Needless to say McMugg produced the black-necked bottle and glasses with alacrity; nor did any of the inmates of the saloon refuse to imbibe at the veteran's expense.

Dick had hoped to find Gil Morey or some of his associates at the saloon, but none were there, that he knew, and so, after lingering around for awhile, he took his departure.

On his way back to the Blair Cottage, however, he had occasion to pass the Hotel Girardin, and saw Gil Morey and a big, fat fellow of about his own age, standing on the steps.

Just as the detective came along, the two men parted, Morey saying in a tone loud enough to reach Dick's ears:

"Oh! don't you fret. I tel' you it's a sure thing, Bill!"

"Well, I hope so," Bill replied, dubiously, as he turned. "Wouldn't like to bet much on it, however!"

"So it's a dead sure thing, is it, Mr. Gil Morey? Well, maybe it is. But what's so dead sure? I'd like to know. Is it the triumph over Mrs. Blair? It strikes forcibly, Mr. Gil Morey, that you are in some way connected with this grave-robbing business, and that you are just the man I shall nab this very night."

Returning to his room he began to array himself for his next venture. Mrs. Blair had furnished him with one of her dresses, and with the other necessities required to effect his complete disguise.

When, after an hour's careful labor, he had perfected this make-up, to his satisfaction, he presented himself before the widow and her daughter, and they both declared that he was a perfect counterpart of Mrs. Blair!

"Why, I can scarcely believe the evidence of my senses!" the good lady exclaimed. "You are indeed an exact representation of me, and no one would suspect the deception, I am sure, were you to appear in public. Am I not right, Bethel?"

"Yes, mamma. If I had chanced to meet Mr. Bristol on the street, in this disguise, I certainly should not have known but what it was yourself."

"Well, if this is the case," Dick said, "I reckon I'm all right. I would now advise you ladies to retire for the night, so that, should there be any spies lurking in the neighborhood, they will not see the two of us of a similar appearance. When the hour arrives, I will visit the beach, and on my return, will, I trust, be able to bring some good news, at least!"

"Oh! sir, but I am so afraid some harm will come to you," Mrs. Blair said, anxiously. "I cannot bear to think of your going all alone."

"Oh! have no fear about me!" Deadwood Dick returned, reassuringly. "I generally come out on top, and presume I shall do so this time."

Acceding to his suggestion, the widow and her daughter retired to their private apartment, while removing his bonnet, Dick remained in possession of the parlor, stretched out upon the sofa to await the appointed hour, book in hand.

At one time he formed the impression that some one on the outside was peering in through the window at him.

Instead of satisfying his suspicion by investigation, he remained perfectly still, and did not glance up from his book.

Shortly after one o'clock, A. M., he arose put on his bonnet, and added a few finishing touches to his make-up, after which he took his departure for the beach.

The town was wrapped in silence, and not a person was to be seen along the water front.

A brisk walk brought him to the spot indicated as the meeting place.

It was a sandy point of the island considerably isolated from the city, itself. Here the waters of the Gulf dashed with a sullen roar—here the soaring moon seemed to send down its most radiant light.

Reaching this point, Dick looked carefully around, but failed to discover any one in the vicinity, except himself.

"I wonder if, after all, my disguise has been penetrated?" he mused. "If so, it is not probable I shall see any of these Ghouls, as they choose to call themselves!"

The ruins of an old sail-boat were near at hand, and Dick went and sat down on it, to await events.

He had not been seated long, however, when

he felt a touch upon the arm, and looking around, was greatly surprised to find a young girl standing beside him.

She was not over twelve or thirteen years of age, and fairly good-looking, despite the fact that her face was considerably pitted with small-pox marks. Her attire, too, was of cheap stuff, and she wore no shoes or stockings.

"Well, my child, who are you?" Dick demanded, in a soft voice.

"I have come for the money!" was the reply.

"Oh! you have, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who sent you?"

"The captain, sir."

"Who is the captain?"

"Scott Scavenger."

"Where is he now?"

"I can't tell you. He sent me for the money, sir, and I want it!"

"Well, my pert miss, you can't have it until you accompany me home. I did not dare bring so much money with me, and so, if you want it, you will have to go long with me."

"I can't do it, ma'am. My orders were to get the money here, or not at all. So if you won't pay it, why I am not to blame."

"No, I sha'n't pay it!" Dick said, seizing her by the arm; "and you must come with me. I shall lock you up until you tell who these Ghouls are, and where they belong."

"Release me, sir!" the girl cried, struggling hard to escape. But it was no use, for the grasp upon her wrist was as firm as a vise. "Release me, or I'll scream for assistance."

"If you do, I shall be under the necessity of gagging you!" Dick replied, grimly. "So you better be sensible and come along, for you have got to go anyhow."

"Never!" she hissed, her black eyes flashing wickedly.

And she was right, too.

The next instant Dick received a blow on the head from behind, that felled him to the ground.

He made a brave effort to regain his feet, but a second blow, full as hard as the first, was the means of laying him out senseless.

While at the Blair Cottage, the widow and her daughter anxiously listened for the daring young detective, but he came not.

The hours dragged by, and another day dawned, but brought with it no tidings of Deadwood Dick.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VULTURE SHOWS HIS CLAWS.

Of course both Mrs. Blair and Bethel were very anxious over the non-return of their champion, whom they had grown to value highly as a friend and protector.

They awaited his return until mid-morning, when the widow said:

"Bethel, dear, we must somehow find out what the matter is. Go first to the post-office, and perhaps you may find a letter of explanation there. If not, go to the chief of police and ask him if he knows where Mr. Bristol is."

So, putting on her things, Bethel set out on her errand.

In about an hour she returned looking considerably excited.

"Well, dear, what is it?" Mrs. Blair asked, anxiously. "Not bad news, I hope."

"Yes, bad news!" Bethel replied. "I went to the post-office and there found a letter, directed in the same hand as the other from the grave-robbler. Here it is; I haven't dared to open it."

"I then went to the chief of police, and he said that Deadwood Dick was seen to visit the beach at two o'clock this morning, but met a girl, whom he evidently tried to force to accompany him to the city. Then two men sprung from the sand, where they had lain buried, and assaulted Mr. Bristol. The officer who saw the attack at once started to Mr. Bristol's assistance, but before they could reach the beach not only had the two ruffians and the girl disappeared, but had also evidently taken Dick with them, as no trace of him could be found. The chief has set men to work on the case, and is confident he will be able to find and rescue our friend."

"God only knows. I hope so," said the widow. "I felt sure something would happen to him. I wonder what this letter contains."

Not without feelings of hesitation she tore away the envelope, and found the following before her:

"MADAM:—Your little game didn't work for a cent, as you will no doubt have learned ere you get this. Your detective friend didn't prove clever enough to beat us, after all, and could have improv-

ed his time far more profitably than by trying to play a counterpart of yourself.

"We have not decided exactly what we shall do with him, but probably shall send him, together with your late lamented husband, on an investigating journey to the realms of Neptune."

"As for yourself, you will never see your husband's bones. You forfeited the opportunity we gave you, and must abide by the consequences."

"Yours Truly,
THE GHOULS OF GALVESTON."

Mrs. Blair burst into tears as she finished reading this cruel letter.

"Oh! Bethel, isn't this awful!" she cried. "That we who have never injured any one should be thus persecuted is more than inhuman. Worse than all, Mr. Bristol, for our sake, has got himself into trouble from which he may never escape. Oh, dear, I know I shall never have another peaceful moment."

"Pray do not worry, mother, for that will not help matters," Bethel said, consolingly. "I have great faith in Mr. Bristol's smartness, and believe that he will succeed in outwitting his captors and making good his escape."

"Ah! I fear you hope in vain. These Ghouls, as they call themselves, must be desperadoes of the most ferocious type, and it stands to reason they will show no mercy to Mr. Bristol, since they have found out that he is a detective. Outlaws, as a rule, hate detectives more than they do the law itself. No! no! Deadwood Dick has gone to his doom, and I feel that I am responsible for it!"

Bethel tried hard to relieve her mother of this idea, but in vain. The widow continued to worry, and was attacked every little while with spells of weeping, and refused to be comforted.

By nightfall she was forced to take to her bed, through utter prostration and nervousness.

Not until Bethel had administered to her a powerful narcotic did her mother fall asleep.

The next morning she was in a high fever, and delirious by spells, and becoming alarmed, Bethel called in a physician.

"A 'mild fever,'" was his verdict, "but not dangerous. Keep her as quiet as possible, and I'll fetch her around all right."

And he did not speak falsely.

Two days later Mrs. Blair had recovered sufficiently, so that she was able to sit in her easy-chair upon the piazza.

She was still pale, weak and nervous, and the doctor had ordered that she must keep perfectly quiet, and not worry over anything, or he could not guarantee but what she would have a relapse.

"Bethel," she said, as they sat that evening on the piazza, watching the strollers along the beach, "have you heard no tidings of Deadwood Dick, yet?"

"No, mother. But, pray do not worry. You know what the doctor said?"

"I know, my child, and I'm trying not to be troubled; but it was a severe blow to me, when I thought that his brave young life might have been sacrificed in looking after our interest. I don't think you took as much of a liking to the young man, as I did, Bethel."

"Why, I don't know, mother. What I have seen of the gentleman has made me think very kindly of him."

"I could have wished even more than that, Bethel, for betwixt you and me, I could have wished to have Mr. Bristol as a son!"

"Why, mother!"

"I mean what I say. I do not know another man in the world I would rather see you married to my child."

"But, mother, such a thing as getting married has been the least of my thoughts, and especially to Mr. Bristol, whom we know nothing about. He may already be married for what we know, and—and, I wouldn't leave you anyhow."

"I don't want you to let me be any barrier to your future happiness, and should Mr. Bristol be so fortunate as to make his escape, and to return to us, I hope you will remember my feelings in the matter."

Further conversation was interrupted by the approach of Morey, who came strolling toward the piazza, in rather a sheepish manner.

"Ladies," he said, pausing a few paces away, "I trust you will pardon this intrusion, but I have come to apologize for my conduct of the other night, and ask your forgiveness. I was under the influence of liquor, and jealous passion, at the time, and have come to make amends, so far as lies in my power!"

"I have nothing particularly to forgive you for," Mrs. Blair said, rather coldly. "You certainly made a disgraceful show of yourself, and if you are truly repentant, that is one good point in your favor."

"And, Miss Bethel! Will she, too, forgive me, and receive me once more back into her favor?"

"I will overlook your ungentlemanly conduct, sir," Bethel replied, "if that will give you any satisfaction, but, as far as receiving you back into my favor, as you express it, that is entirely out of the question. I will have nothing more to do with you."

"Oh! Bethel—Miss Blair, do not say that. You know how devotedly I love you, and I want to make you my wife. I have never been in a condition to ask you, before, but now, I have come into a snug little fortune, and am able to support you. Pray forgive me, Bethel, and promise to become mine, and I will be the happiest fellow on the face of the earth!"

That is impossible, sir. It is not my intention to get married at all; so, please consider my answer definite."

"By no means!" Morey replied, flushing angrily. "If I see fit, I can force you to marry me, Bethel!"

"You can force me to marry you?"

"Yes, I can, and if I cannot win you in one way, I intend to adopt another. I hate to play a villain's part, but business is business!"

"How dare you threaten my daughter, sir?" cried Mrs. Blair, growing excited.

"Be calm, mother!" cautioned Bethel. "I do not fear the coward, in spite of his threats. He'll have a good time in forcing me to marry him!"

"Don't be too sure about that," Morey sneered. "There's trouble hanging over the heads of you two women, if I am not mistaken, and you'll regret not having a friend to aid you, then, mark my words!"

Then, turning, he strode away.

"I wonder what he means?" the widow asked, looking anxiously at her daughter.

"I don't know, I am sure!" was the reply. "He evidently had an idea he could frighten us. I guess there is no danger that he will trouble us any more."

But, Bethel really felt more uneasy than she was willing to admit.

The next day, while they were at dinner, there came a ring at the door-bell.

Bethel hastened to answer the summons, in hopes that Deadwood Dick had returned; but, instead, she found two burly policemen standing on the piazza.

"Is the Widow Blair at home?" one of them asked.

"She is," Bethel replied. "What do you want of her?"

"Tell her to come to the door a moment. I wish to speak with her!"

Bethel accordingly called her mother, who came forward, looking very pale and frightened.

"Madam," said the officer, "I regret to say I have a warrant for your arrest!"

"Merciful heaven! what for?" the widow gasped.

"The charge against you is murder!" was the grave response.

CHAPTER IX.

IN DURANCE VILE.

In the mean time, we must not lose sight of Deadwood Dick.

When he awoke to consciousness, it was with a dull, disagreeable headache, and a partial loss of memory.

His mind gradually came back to him, however, and he remembered the two blows having been dealt him, on the beach.

That he was not on the beach now was plainly evident; instead, he was in a strongly-built apartment, guarded by a heavy, grated door, that looked out into a narrow passage, where a smoky lamp burned in its bracket.

Judging by the swaying motion of his new domicile, Dick came to the conclusion that it was on board a vessel of some sort.

The cell was furnished only with an iron single bedstead and mattress.

An iron bolt encircled Dick's waist, to which was attached one end of a long chain. The other end was fastened to a ring in the ceiling.

The chain was long enough to admit of the prisoner moving to any part of the cell, his hands and feet having been left unbound.

When he awoke to consciousness, Dick was lying on this bed, but arose to a sitting posture, and surveyed his surroundings curiously.

"Well, this looks kind of interesting," he observed. "Guess I'm jugged, sure enough, but the question is, where? Hello!"

The latter exclamation was brought about by a discovery.

While unconscious, he had been relieved of

the female apparel he had worn, on his visit to the beach.

Fortunately, he had retained his own garments underneath, and these he still possessed, although his pockets had been rifled of their contents.

As good luck would have it, he had left his valuables in his valise, at the Blair Cottage; so his captors did not get much plunder.

"Well, they've got the widow's dress, and I'll have to buy another, providing I ever get out of here. But the present outlook is rather slim; hang me if it ain't! I wonder what the chances out of a hundred are, anyhow?"

He arose and went to the door, and peered out between the iron bars; but he could see only a few feet along the passage, so he returned to his cot and sat down.

"Guess I'm on board a ship, and not a very big one at that, judging by the way she rocks. Hanged if I wouldn't like to get a peep outside of here, to see where I am."

He spent some time in inspecting his apartment, and the chain that held him a prisoner, but he finally came to the conclusion that his only hope of making his escape was through outside assistance; so he lay down again, to await developments.

Several hours passed ere any one approached his cell, and then it was the same girl he had seen on the beach.

She carried a bright lantern, and flashed its rays in through the bars of the door.

"Ah! so you have recovered, have you?" she observed.

"Yes, I have," Dick replied, grimly. "What of it?"

"Oh! nothin' much. I tho't I'd come and see if you wanted anything to eat?"

"Well, I reckon I could get away with a good porterhouse steak!"

"Humph. I guess you won't get no sech high feedin' around here as that!" the girl said, with a toss of the head. "All you'll get is some bread and water. If that don't suit you, you can go without."

"Oh! well, fire along. Reckon that's better than nothin'. But, say, miss, supposin' you tell me who you are, if we're to be acquaintances."

"My name is Roxy—that's all I can tell you," was the reply.

"Roxy, eh? Well, Roxy, you're pretty foxy. It was you who got me into this scrape!"

The girl shook her head.

"No it wasn't," she retorted. "You've no one to blame but yourself!"

"How so?"

"Cause the gang were onto your disguise, fore you come to the beach."

"The Ghouls, you mean?"

"Yes."

"What are they going to do with me?"

"I dunno."

"I'm on board a ship of some sort, ain't I?"

The girl nodded, but gave no verbal answer.

"When am I to see the captain of the gang?" was Dick's next query.

"Dunno. To-night, maybe!" and then, she turned abruptly away.

"Humph!" mused Dick. "She's inclined to be as close-mouthed as a clam! But wait! If she is to continue my jaileress, I'll bet a dollar I won't be a prisoner long!"

Roxy returned after awhile, and handed Dick a slice of bread and a bottle of water, between the bars.

"Thank you," Dick said. "Are your parents living, Roxy?"

"Dunno. Never had any, as I knows of."

"Ah! I see. You work for the gang for what little they see fit to give you."

The girl nodded.

"What a shame," Dick went on, "that you should grow up, leading such a life. Wouldn't you rather have a nice home, in a nice, quiet family, with plenty of good clothes, and a chance to go to school?"

Roxy's face brightened up a little at this.

"Yes, there's lots of things I'd like to have," she confessed, "but it's no use wishin'. A poor thing like me can't be a chooser."

"Pshaw! That's all nonsense! You'll never amount to anything as long as these ruffians hold me a prisoner. I'll tell you what I'll do, Roxy. You help me to make my escape, and I will place you in the nice home I spoke of, and all you will have to do, is go to school. Just think how much nicer that would be than to lead the life you are now leading!"

"Oh! sir, I would not dare do that!" Roxy replied. "The gang would kill me if I were to run away from them!"

"Nothing of the sort! I will see that you are

securely hidden until they are all in jail, and then you shall be installed in your new home. Besides, I will give you two hundred dollars out of my own pocket that shall be all your own."

"You are awful kind," Roxy said, tears springing into her eyes, "but, really, I daren't do it. The captain has sworn he would hunt me to the end of the earth if I ever deserted."

"He'll never get the chance, if I once get free. What is your captain's real name?"

"I do not know. The men call him Scavenger—that's all I know."

"Do you know the names of any of the rest of the gang?"

"I cannot tell you. You must not ask me."

"Then, you won't accept my offer?"

"I dare not. Besides, if I wanted to, I could not release you. I have no keys."

"Perhaps you could find a file somewhere. If so I could soon release myself."

"I think there's such a thing on board."

"How many persons are there on board?"

"Only myself, the man who takes care of the boat, and yourself. That's all. I must be going."

"Hold on. One more question. How long have I been aboard?"

"About thirty-six hours," Roxy replied, and then hurried away again.

"Thirty-six hours, eh?" Dick mused. "Mrs. Blair and pretty Bethel are no doubt considerably anxious over my non-return. Well, I can't help it if they are. Here I am, and I don't see but what I have got to take matters as they come!"

CHAPTER X.

AN 'ON THE DECK' COURT.

THE day wore away very wearily to Deadwood Dick, whose active spirit chafed under this sort of monotonous incarceration.

He managed, however, to get in a couple hours' sleep, and when he awoke, he judged it was pretty near nightfall.

Not long after he awoke, Roxy made her appearance, and gave him some bread and butter, some cold meat, and a flask of cold tea.

"I guess the captain will be on board this evening," she announced, "and if you are summoned before him, you had best act civilly, for he is a bad man when he's mad, and has no respect or mercy for any one!"

She hurried off, then, before Dick could get a chance to say anything.

"Well, let that captain come as soon as he pleases," Dick muttered. "I'll guarantee he won't make very much out of me—not if I know myself. I shall at least find out what is to be done with me."

Not long afterward, Dick heard the clanking of machinery, and by the rocking of the boat knew it was in motion.

"Here we go!" he soliloquized. "I wonder if they intend to take me out to sea and dump me?"

For over an hour the boat plowed away through the water; then the clanking of the machinery ceased, and the boat came to a standstill.

Shortly afterward, two burly men approached Dick's cell, each carrying a lantern swung upon his arm.

Both were roughly dressed, and their faces were hidden by grotesque *papier mache* masks, one mask representing a baboon's "mug," while the other represented a pug dog.

Each also carried a cocked revolver, ready for instant use.

The Pug opened the door of the cell, and he and his companion entered.

"Mr. Deadwood Dick," the Pug said, through the aperture of his mask, "you are summoned into the presence of the Captain of the Ghouls. First, however, we must handcuff you. Will you allow us to do this without trouble, or shall we have to use force?"

"Oh! I suppose I might as well acquiesce!" Dick replied.

"Exactly. You are sensible. It would do you no good to resist."

So Dick submitted to the handcuffs; then the iron band was unlocked and removed from around his waist.

Each of the outlaws took him by the arm, and conducted him to the deck above.

The night was warm and pleasant, and the soaring moon shed down a brilliant light upon the dancing billows.

The vessel, which proved to be a handsome steam-yacht, was riding at anchor in a little cove, not far from the Gulf Coast, but was nowhere in sight of Galveston Island.

Seated about the deck were six men, roughly dressed, but disguised differently than the two who conducted Deadwood Dick on deck.

Instead of the grotesque masks, they wore black hoods, with long peaked tops, the hood covering the entire face, with exception of the eyes, a portion of the nose, and an aperture for speaking. The cloth around the immediate vicinity of the eye-holes and mouth was painted white, which of course gave the wearers of the disguise a rather unearthly appearance.

The six men were seated in a sort of semi-circle, and one was mounted upon a stool, considerably higher than the rest, which seemed to indicate that he was in command.

Deadwood Dick was led before this individual and seated upon a stool, while his two conductors stood on either side of him, with drawn revolvers.

Then followed several seconds of silence, ere the Captain of the Ghouls spoke.

When he did, it was in a deep, sonorous tone, but a very poor effort it was to disguise the man's natural voice.

"Deadwood Dick!" he began, "are you aware in whose august presence you are seated?"

"I am!" Dick replied coolly. "It is my misfortune to be seated in the presence of a gang of the lowest, vilest and most degraded ruffians in all Texas!"

"Quite right!" the captain said with a chuckle. "You hit the nail plum square on the head, the first time, sir. You couldn't have fallen in with a worse crowd if you had tried."

"No need to tell me that!" retorted the prisoner. "It stands to reason that a man who becomes the tool of Horace Henshaw, must be as black a wretch as his master."

The captain started violently, and uttered a savage oath.

"Curse you! what do you mean?" he roared, half-rising from his seat.

"I mean that you can't close my eye up for a cent!" Dick retorted. "While you may be Captain Scott Scavenger, the grave robber, on board this vessel, when you're ashore you're Horace Henshaw, the shyster lawyer and sneak-thief. You needn't try any longer to disguise your voice, for I know you like a book."

"Cu'ses seize you!" the scoundrel hissed. "I've a mind to blow your brains out where you sit."

"I suppose you have that privilege," was Dick's fearless answer. "I don't know why you should wax so wroth at the truth, unless truth is poison to you."

"You infernal detective cur! It was a sorry day you crossed my path."

Deadwood Dick laughed.

"What puzzles me is, why you sent for me, to hunt down the infamous gang of which you are yourself the leader!"

"Well, I had an object," he admitted. "I knew you were the best all-around detective and man-hunter west of the Mississippi. We also had a prisoner who knew of you, and he often made his brags that, if he made his escape, he would hunt you up, and come back and break up our game. He did finally escape, and disappeared, and as he was a bull-headed cuss, I was fearful that he would carry out his promise; so I concluded to send for you myself, and, after I got you here, to let you nose around awhile, to see just how shrewd you were, and then, if you were likely to be dangerous to our interests, I could put you out of the way—just as I shall do now!"

"Oh, will you? If so, all I have got to say is that you ought to have got your work in before I knocked that little insurance scheme of yours in the head!"

"Oh! that's all right. I shall win my point in that game yet, now that you are out of the way. What do you think we ought to do with you, Mister Deadwood Dick?"

"Why, about the cutest caper I know of would be to set me at liberty."

"Oh, no! We're not doing business that way. The boys are in favor of getting rid of you without delay; but, personally, I'm not in favor of bloodshed. So I have carefully thought the matter over, and resolved to give you the choice of two things: Either you must take an iron-clad oath and become an active member of the gang, or to-morrow night this boat will take you out to sea, and, loaded with weights, you will be sunk to the bottom. And so perish all detectives who come meddling in our business!"

"So you will add murder to your other crimes, eh?"

"When necessary for self-protection, only. You yourself have the power to prevent the crime, by joining us. You are a shrewd young

fellow, and would make a clever member, after a little coaching."

"I don't think I'd make much of a go as a villain," Dick replied, "and I'd rather not tackle the job."

"You'd be just the right man in the right place. You are a detective, and could shield our biz, which does not consist alone of robbing graves. We have various other irons in the fire that pay big dividends."

"So your other detective member shields you from the law, does he?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"Gil Morey!"

"See here, you're too devilish sharp for your age, young man!"

Dick laughed. "There's no grasshoppers on my whiskers. By the way, of what does your initiatory oath consist?"

"That matters not. Suffice to say, that once a man takes it he never will break it."

"And if I refuse to join, you mean to down me, you say?"

"Postively, yes. I will give you until to-morrow night, at ten o'clock to decide. If you conclude to join us, Roxy will come ashore, and let us know. If you refuse, Old Hulks will run the yacht out to sea and pitch you overboard. So you know what to expect. Do you understand?"

"I do," Dick replied.

"Then, boys, take him back to the dungeon, and confine him, as he was before!"

This was done, and in a few minutes Dick was once more alone in his gloomy cell.

Soon after, he felt the yacht once more in motion, and concluded that it was taking the Ghouls ashore.

CHAPTER XI.

OVER THE SHADOWED SEA!

DICK slept little, that night, for his mind was busied with the problem of the future. What was he to do? Here he was, a helpless prisoner, in the hands and at the mercy of a band of men who placed no value on a life, if, by taking it, it would screen their own wickedness.

Two choices had been given—one to become one of the Ghouls—the other, a grave at the bottom of the Gulf.

Which should he take—life or death?

Long he pondered over the situation.

"By Jove! I don't see but what it's about six of one and half a dozen of the other. Let me see—I've got until to-morrow night, ten o'clock, to decide in. Well, I sha'n't decide till the last minute. Something in my favor may turn up twixt now and then. I've been in many a fix, as tight as this, and got out of it, at that. So there's no use of despairing yet."

"I've got a good deal of hope based on Roxy. I believe she wants to get away from the gang, but is actually afraid of the brutes. Oh, if I could only get ashore, once, wouldn't I make short work of them? If I say yes, Roxy goes ashore, notifies them, and they come aboard, and initiate me. If I say no, old Hulks takes me out to sea and sinks me for fish fodder. Old Hulks must be the chap that runs the boat. Will Roxy stand by and see him chuck me overboard? By Jove! I can't believe it. That girl has got some spunk of her own, and I believe she'd fight before she'd see me drown."

And thus Dick's brain continued to be racked by thoughts and conjectures relative to the morrow and the future.

After a couple of hours' run, the boat came once more to a halt, and did not run again that night.

It was almost morning ere the prisoner fell asleep and was awakened by the rattling at the door of his cell.

Roxy was already there with his breakfast, which consisted of some buttered biscuits, a fried fish, and a flask of coffee.

"Ah! you're the girl," Dick said, as he received the stuff between the bars. "I thank you very much, Roxy. By the way, have the Ghouls gone ashore?"

"Oh, yes; long ago."

"You and Hulks are alone, then?"

"Yes."

"Where were you when I was on deck?"

"Not far away."

"Listening?"

"Yes."

"You heard the sentence the captain imposed on me?"

"I did."

"What did you think of it?"

"Oh, it was about what I expected. You were lucky they didn't do for you at once."

"Then you think if I refuse to join 'em I will be drowned by Hulks."

"Them's his orders. He generally does as the captain says."

"Indeed! Well, now, Roxy, if you were in my place, what would you do—join the gang?"

"I reckon not."

"No? Then you would drown?"

"You bet!"

And the girl laughed, as though she thought drowning somewhat of a pastime.

Dick looked rather dubious at this.

"I am inclined to think you're about as heartless as the rest of the crowd," he remarked.

The girl's eyes flashed, and her face instantly became grave.

"But I ain't, tho', and you're the first one as ever twitted me of such a thing."

"Then pray forgive me, and take no offense. It was because you spoke so coolly of serious matters that I made the remark. I hope you will not be offended, Roxy."

"No. I ain't offended, I don't get mad easy, but when I do git mad, I stay mad."

"And, so you don't think it policy to join the Ghouls?"

"No, I don't."

"Why not?"

"'Cause, they'll make a slave out of you, and make you do all their dirty work."

"But, I don't want to drown!"

"You won't, neither."

"Why, you just said, awhile ago, that I would."

"Oh! I was just seein' how you took to it, that's all."

"What, then, is to prevent my being drowned, if I don't join the gang? Are you going to help me, Roxy?"

"No, I hain't got no keys. You must help yourself!" and she drew two files from her dress pocket, and shoved them between the bars.

One was a flat file, and the other a three cornered one, and both were new.

Dick seized the precious tools, with an exclamation of joy.

"Files, by Jove!" he said. "Roxy, may God bless you for this, for you have furnished the means of obtaining my liberty! Heaven will reward you, and so will I. Will you be ready to go with me little woman?"

"Yes, but you must not attempt to leave the dungeon, until dark, when I will come for you. Old Hulks eats his supper in the steward's cabin shortly after dark. While he is eating it, we will lower a boat, and row ashore."

"Capital! Roxy, you are a jewel, and you will find I will do by you, just as I promised."

"I am not afraid but you will. I must be going, now, sir. Don't make any more noise with the files than you can possibly help."

"I'll be very careful," Dick replied, after which the girl took her departure.

Dick ate his repast with more relish than though it had been a king's feast, and certainly in much less time.

This done he examined his tools and found them all that he could wish.

He then set to work.

To file the belt so he could remove it from his waist, at will, was the first thing to be done, but on second thought Dick concluded to file the clasp of the padlock in two, as that would be easiest to do, and should he have any chance visitors, they would not so easily observe that he was in readiness to escape.

It required but about an hour to fix matters, so that he could remove both the lock and belt, at a moment's notice.

He next turned his attention to the door, but had no time to form any plans, for, hearing heavy footsteps approaching, he quickly retreated to his bed, and lay down, secreting the files in his pocket.

He was none too soon, for, a moment later, a man paused in front of the door. He was a broad shouldered person, pretty well along in years—a typical old sea-dog, with white hair, and as ugly a mug as one could wish to see.

He squinted through the bars at the detective, without uttering a word.

"Hello! thar, old duffer!" cried Dick. "Who are ye, an' what d'ye want?"

The sailor uttered a grunt, spat out a quid of tobacco, and replied:

"Oh! I just come down to have a look at you if you're the feller I'm to sink, to-night!"

"Yes, I reckon I'm the chap you're lookin' for," Dick replied, "but, it so happens I haven't sunk yet!"

"Oh! you'll sink fast enough, once I get hold of you."

"Don't be too sure about that; I've a notion I shall join the Ghouls."

"Waal, remember you've only got from now till ten to-night, to decide in."

And with this warning the old salt hobbled away. Waiting until he thought it safe to resume operations, Dick approached the door and closely examined its construction.

It was of half inch bars of iron, riveted to like cross-pieces, and was hung by heavy hinges, also riveted.

The hinges were on the inside of the door. To these he turned his attention. By filing off the rivet heads he could remove the sections belonging to the door. This seemed, therefore, the proper thing to do.

So he set to work, and in a couple of hours' time, he had the rivet heads filed off, and to pry off the hinge, was but the work of a moment.

But, he chose not to do this until the last moment, as he might have callers, in the meantime.

Roxy brought him his dinner, at noon, when he assured her he was all prepared to escape.

When she came with his supper, she said:

"Eat quickly. I shall come for you soon."

"All right. Is it getting dark?"

"Yes, and will be very dark. The sky is all clouded over, and we shall probably have no difficulty in making our escape."

"That is good. Where are we?"

"The yacht is anchored in Galveston Bay, quite near the city. Oh! I can row ashore, in a jiffy, if we can only get our small boat lowered all right. Never fear about me!"

She then danced merrily away.

Dick disposed of his supper, quickly. Then he pried off the hinges, and lifted the door of his cell ajar, sufficiently to admit of his egress.

Stepping into the passage, he awaited the return of Roxy.

She came soon, and together, they went softly up on deck.

The plucky girl had already lowered a boat, herself, and in a few moments the twain were seated in it, with the oars in Roxy's grasp.

She soon demonstrated that she could pull a good oar, for with almost silent movement, she sent the little craft gliding through the water swiftly.

They were not long in reaching shore, and when they were safely landed, Dick grasped his rescuer warmly by the hands.

"Roxy," he said, feelingly, "you are a noble girl, and my gratitude knows no bounds. Come, now, and I will take you to a place where you will be secure and comfortable, until it is safe to take you to your new home!"

CHAPTER XII.

HARRY HENSHAW ON THE WAR-PATH.

WORDS are inadequate to express the astonishment and horror of Mrs. Blair and Bethel, at the words of the police officer, as detailed in a previous chapter.

"Arrest—me—for—murder!" the widow gasped, growing deathly pale. "No! no! there is some mistake!"

"Sorry, ma'am, but there is no mistake. You are the widow of the late Benjamin Blair, I believe?"

"Yes!"

"Then you are the person that my warrant calls for. My duty is to take you to the station-house. The judge chances to be there, tonight, and perhaps he will admit you to bail."

"Then, I will go!" the widow said, turning to Bethel, with a calmness born of desperation.

"You come with me, dear."

Turning to the officer, who had acted as spokesman:

"You will allow us a few minutes, in which to get ready, sir?"

"Oh! certainly, madam. Take your own time; we are only too sorry that we are obliged to take you at all."

So Bethel and her mother entered the house, while the officers sat down upon the piazza.

"Oh! Bethel, I see it all, now," Mrs. Blair moaned. "This is the result of my refusal to marry Horace Henshaw. This is revenge!"

"Yes, dear mother. But too well I can understand that. He means to swear your life away? Oh! what shall we do—what shall we do?" and Bethel burst into tears.

"Be calm, my child. It is no time now, to give way to grief," the good widow said. "Put on your hat, and get the money out of the drawer, and put it in your pocket. If a chance is offered, you must bail me out, no matter what it costs."

"Yes, mother, I would rather that every cent should go than that you should spend one hour in a prison cell."

They were soon ready, and locked up the house.

"If you would prefer, ladies, I can call a hack, around the corner, for I full well realize

how unpleasant it will be for you to walk through the street, under police escort!"

"Call a hack, by all means," Bethel said, quickly.

So one of the officers hurried away.

"Who caused this warrant to be issued?" Mrs. Blair demanded of the remaining cop.

"It was issued on the affidavit of a gas-meter inspector, named Ferryle, who claims to have accidentally witnessed the crime."

The officer soon came back with the hack, and the party got in, and were driven rapidly away.

The station-house reached, the ladies were conducted into the presence of the portly lieutenant, who presided behind the desk.

He chanced to know the Blairs, and put forth his hand warmly.

"Mrs. Blair," he said, "I am sorry to have been obliged to issue this warrant, but you know I have to do many unpleasant things. I should not worry, however, for it may all come out right."

"It is a malicious and villainous attack!" the widow declared.

"No doubt of it, madam. But, it is also a serious charge, and you know the law is no respecter of persons, as a general thing."

"Then, must I remain here to-night?"

"Well, not if I can help it. The police judge happens to be in the next room, and perhaps he can be prevailed upon to let you off!"

He disappeared in another room for a minute, but soon returned, accompanied by a crabbed-looking old gent in broadcloth and glasses, and with a head as bald as an apple.

"Well! well! ahem!" he began, surveying the ladies critically; "this is rather an unpleasant charge against you, madam."

"It is, indeed, sir, and an entirely unexpected one, I assure you."

"Yes. Well, do you know this man Ferryle, who made the affidavit against you?"

"I do not, sir—never heard of such a person."

"I suppose you plead not guilty to his charge of killing your husband?"

"I certainly do. On the day of his death my husband was attacked with a periodical spell of mental aberration. He was the most violent I had ever seen him, and threatened to kill me and my daughter, I grew so frightened that I sent Bethel for help. During her absence he fell in a fit, and must have suffered terribly, for he tore his hair, and, last of all, drew a knife from his coat-pocket and plunged it into his heart."

"Well, Mrs. Blair, I am sorry this charge has been made against you, and still more sorry that, owing to repairs going on in the police court, I cannot give you a public hearing until day after to-morrow. I do not wish to see you detained until then, and if we can make some satisfactory arrangements about bonds—"

Just then Horace Henshaw rushed breathlessly into the room.

"Hello, here! What is the matter?" he cried. "I just heard that Mrs. Blair was arrested! What's it all about?"

"Mrs. Blair has been arrested for the murder of her husband, at the instance of one Ferdinand Ferryle," the judge replied; "and, as I don't want to see the lady locked up, we were just discussing the subject of releasing her on bonds."

"Bonds? Why, certainly, judge! I'll go on her bonds for all I'm worth."

Mrs. Blair stepped quickly forward.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Horace Henshaw!" she said, sternly. "I can give my own security if the honorable judge will kindly name how much is required."

"Humph! You're mighty independent, it strikes me," Henshaw growled, "and I should advise the judge to make your bail strong enough, so there will be no danger of your skipping the town."

"I believe you have no voice in this matter, Mr. Henshaw!" the judge spoke up, quickly.

Then, to the widow:

"Mrs. Blair, I propose to be as lenient toward you as possible, and so, if you will promise to be in police court day after to-morrow, at ten o'clock, I will let you off on one thousand dollars bail."

"I promise to be on hand, sir," the widow said. "Bethel, give the gentleman one thousand dollars."

Bethel obeyed, and after counting it, the judge said:

"Very well, ladies, you can go."

And so, much to the chagrin of Henshaw, the widow and her daughter did go home.

And before either retired to rest that night, they in concert offered up a prayer, beseeching the Almighty to come to their aid, and praying that through His divine agency assistance

might come to them, and carry them safely through that maelstrom of trouble and disgrace.

"Oh! if Mr. Bristol would only return!" were the last words on the widow's lips ere she fell asleep.

The next morning one of the papers was full of sensational news, and contained an account of the arrest of Mrs. Blair for the supposed murder of her husband.

Also, it gave a brief account of the discovery of the existence of a band of professional grave-robbers and all-around rogues, in the city, and the efforts that were being made to capture them.

All day long a curious crowd of idlers was gathered about the Blair cottage, but both the widow and her daughter kept themselves as much out of sight as possible.

During the forenoon there came a ring at the door-bell, and, on answering the summons, Bethel found Harry Henshaw standing on the piazza.

He had evidently been in a fight, for his clothes were soiled, and his left eye was black and blue.

"Good-morning, Miss Bethel!" the young man saluted. "May I come in a few minutes? I have a matter of importance to speak of to your mother."

"I am sorry, sir, but we are not receiving callers to-day, Mr. Henshaw."

"I know. You are in trouble, but that need not exclude me. The information I have to give, you will both prize very highly."

"Then, come in, sir!" Bethel said, leading the way to the partially-darkened parlor, where Mrs. Blair was reclining upon the sofa. "Mother, here is Mr. Harry Henshaw, who wishes to see you!"

"Be seated, Mr. Henshaw," the widow said. "You are quite a stranger." For, before Harry became utterly reckless, he had been a frequent visitor to the Blair cottage, and had paid considerable attention to Bethel; but, gradually, his visits had fallen off in frequency, until they ceased altogether, of his own accord.

"Yes, Mrs. Blair. This is the first time I have called for some time," the young man replied. "The truth is, I've been going it pretty wild, for the past six months, and was ashamed to come here any more. But, now, it is different. I am a changed man, and hope that the social ties of the past may be renewed."

"Do you come from your father, sir?"

"If you will take pains to observe that my clothes are soiled and my eye is blacked, you may infer that you are right. Yes, Mrs. Blair, I have just left my parent, forever!"

"Indeed? Have you had a quarrel with him?"

"Well, yes, somewhat. He proved himself to me to be a double-dyed villain, and after I had expressed my opinion of him, he blacked my eye for me, and assisted me to make a flying leap into the street.

"My object in coming to you, Mrs. Blair, is two-fold. I am now homeless and penniless. I intend to brace up and be a man, in the future, and want to get some place to board, until I can find a situation. I bethought myself of you, and thought I would make an appeal to your goodnature.

"The second object of my visit is to tell you that there is a foul conspiracy on foot to ruin you, and my father is at the head of it."

"I know it, Harry, and I fear he will succeed!"

"Not if I know myself, ho won't!" Harry replied. "I can be an invaluable witness for you, in your forthcoming trial, and think I can get you discharged."

"Do you mean this, Harry Henshaw?"

"Ay! I certainly do!"

"Then, you are thrice welcome to our home, for as long as you may see fit to remain. But, tell us, how did the rupture come about, between you, and your father?"

"All on account of an infamous proposition he made me. Because I was wild and reckless, he evidently thought me as black-hearted as himself. But he found out his mistake, mighty quick, I can tell you."

"I was broke, this morning, and went to him for some funds. Although, heretofore, he has been quite liberal with me, he immediately refused, on this occasion. I endeavored to argue with him, and finally, he said:

"Harry, I have a thousand dollars in my pocket, and if you have gumption enough to earn it you can have it!"

"I inquired what I would have to do, and his reply astounded me. He said I must appear in court and testify against you. I must tell the court that on frequent visits of mine to your home, I had heard you threaten to kill your husband, and on one occasion, had prevented

you from doing so. For swearing this base lie, in court, I was to receive the sum of one thousand dollars!"

"Well, I said but few words, but in them few I told the old man what I thought of him, and as a result, he blacked my eye, and threw me out. I'll acknowledge he did that, for physically, and scientifically, he is undeniably a better man than I am. But, I'll show him who he's been fooling with, when I get him in the court-room, and don't you forget it!"

And Harry was evidently in dead earnest, too!

CHAPTER XIII.

BILL LITTLE LATCHED.

MR. WILLIAM LITTLE, whose name has before been mentioned, in the course of our story, sat in his cosey little parlor, the afternoon preceding the day of Mrs. Blair's impending trial, engaged in drawing satisfaction out of a fragrant cigar.

Mr. Little, when not engaged in work, was a thoroughly home man.

He was like most men of enormous avoirdupois, and his round, smooth, good-natured face, did not suggest that there were any bad traits about the man, or that he was ever troubled with insomnia or a prickly conscience.

Two pretty little children—twins—played at his feet, while his wife, a thin, sad-faced woman, sat engaged at sewing, near at hand.

It was a cosey home picture, and but for the sad-faced wife, one would have never suspected that the arch-demon, trouble, had gained entrance to that family.

"Mary Jane," Mr. Little observed, as he rolled clouds of cigar smoke ceilingward, "what makes you so mum, to-day. You haven't spoke scarcely a word since I told you about Old Hulks chucking the young fellow overboard!"

"Is it any wonder, William? It makes me feel very badly, when I think of that awful deed!"

"Well, it was tough, to be sure. But, it was the captain's orders, and I'm not responsible for his crimes. There's one thing I am thinking seriously about, Mary!"

"Well, William, what is it?"

"I'm thinking of quitting the gang, and going back to my trade. I'm getting sick of being a tool for a man like Hor. Henshaw!"

"Oh, William! Do you really mean it?" and Mrs. Little looked up, her sad face beaming with an expression of suddenly aroused hope.

"Yes, I mean it!" Bill replied. "I'm sorry I ever allowed myself to be drawn into the gang, and since Hulks told me, this morning, that he had done away with the prisoner, I've been feeling pretty bad, and have resolved to quit."

His wife threw down her sewing, and running to her husband, threw her arms affectionately around his neck.

"Oh! William," she cried, "you can never know what a load your words have lifted from my heart. It has worried me oh! so much, because you have been associated with that terrible gang!"

"I know it has, my dear, but until now, I have not dared attempt to withdraw, as I have been closely watched, and the penalty of desertion is instant death. In my opinion, now, however, the gang is short-lived, and I don't want to be a member when they are nabbed. So if I quit 'em we shall have to go elsewhere, right off."

"Yes, yes! let's leave at once, and go far away, before it is too late."

"We cannot go very far, dear, for I haven't much money."

"I have about a hundred dollars saved up, William, from my own means, and that will take us a good ways. Come! let's pack up at once."

"No, we cannot afford to take our furniture with us. It will be an impediment to our flight. We will have to sacrifice it to a dealer, and then, when we get relocated, replace it, as fast as we can."

Just then, there was a knock upon the door. Mrs. Little went to answer the summons, and as she opened the door, a young man stepped into the room.

Little, at first, could not make out who the unceremonious visitor was; then he sat bolt upright in his chair, and uttered a yell of horror.

"Deadwood Dick!" he cried.

"At your service!" the visitor replied, as he complacently helped himself to a seat, not neglecting to partly betray the fact that his right hand covered a short six-shooter. "I reckon you hardly expected to see me back so soon, from Davy Jones's locker, friend Little?"

Little made an effort to answer, but his tongue

clung to the roof of his mouth. He was too utterly astounded to speak.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion, sir?" Mrs. Little demanded, coming to her husband's aid. "Who are you, sir, and what do you want here?"

"Madam, you will please have the kindness to be seated, and remain quiet!" Dick commanded, respectfully but firmly. "My business is with your husband, and not with you. I am Deadwood Dick, the detective, the same chap the Ghouls intended to drown, last night. They got left, however, as I made my escape before the appointed hour."

Dick then turned to the man of avoirdupois.

"Well, Mr. Little, you seem somewhat surprised at my reappearance!"

"Surprise is no name for it!" Little gasped.

"You supposed me to be at the bottom of the sea, did you?"

"Yes; I learned this morning that Hulks had carried out the captain's orders."

"Hulks lied to screen himself," Dick declared. "I concluded to postpone my visit to Neptuneville indefinitely."

"Well, what brings you here?"

"Oh, I have a little warrant to serve on you, that's all. But I ain't in no great hurry about executing it. I want to have a little talk with you first, you see."

"Well, what do you want to talk about?"

"I've got matters pretty well perfected for breaking up this gang of Ghouls, as you style yourselves. State's Prison is eagerly awaiting to receive them one and all, and I only want a few more points in order to make a general arrest. I want these points from you."

"From me?"

"That's what I said."

"Well, you'll get no points from me, young man, you can bet!"

"Oh, yes, I will!" Dick returned, confidently. "Before coming here I made a number of inquiries, and learned that, as a whole, you were a pretty good sort of fellow. Says I, to myself, here's a man with a wife and two children on his hands, and hang me if I don't go and see him and offer him the first chance!"

"How do you mean? I fail to comprehend your meaning."

"I mean, give you first chance to turn State's evidence against the rest of the gang and save yourself a long term of imprisonment."

Little brightened at this.

"Would I be let off free if I did this?" he asked. "I have only belonged to the gang about two months, and have never taken, as yet, a hand in any of their depredations. I was telling my wife, before you came, of my intention of withdrawing from the gang, and going to work at my trade in some other town."

"Yes, if you give me the names of the whole gang, and turn State's evidence against them in court, you will be allowed to go Scot free!"

"It's a bargain! I'll do it!"

"Very well. Give me the names of all who are known as 'The Ghouls.'"

"You know, of course, who the captain is?"

"Yes; Horace Henshaw."

"Right you are. He has been the king-pin villain of the lot, all along. Next to him in authority is Gil Morey. After him comes Hen and Frank Mitchell, Walter Marsh Fred Warren; a fellow best known as Reddy the Tough, a man named Barker, Morris Shannon and myself."

"Where can these fellows be found?"

"Oh, they've scattered considerably. Their original hang-out was at McMugg's, on Mechanic street, but the cops began to watch them pretty sharp, and they took a tumble and scattered. The police know 'em pretty well, and it won't be a hard matter to nab 'em."

"Very well. I shall have to invite you to comfortable quarters in the station-house, until to-morrow, Mr. Little, when you will be given a chance to turn State's evidence before the proper authorities, and upon giving bonds will be released until the case comes up in the present term of court, now in session."

"But, I can give no bonds."

"Oh! I'll fix that. To secure the conviction of the gang, there are plenty who will go on your bond. I have a cab outside, and you can be taken to the station, without any one being the wiser for it."

"Yes, and once you get me there, you will keep me there!"

"My word for it, no! I will see that you are treated squarely. When Deadwood Dick gives his word he never goes back on it!"

"I believe you, sir. You are one man of a thousand I would trust, and will accompany you. So cheer up, wife, and all will soon be

right. The dark clouds are gradually breaking away, and ere long I will be a free man, ready and willing to begin a better life anew."

Little put on his hat, kissed his wife and children, and left the house in company with the prince of Western detectives.

A cab was waiting outside, and entering this the two were driven rapidly away.

Arrived at the station-house, Dick succeeded in getting his man inside, without attracting attention, and the witness was provided with as cheerful a cell as the place afforded.

Dick, then, donned a disguise, loaned him by one of the police detectives, and took his leave.

He had yet another matter to attend to that day.

CHAPTER XIV.

DICK CORRALS ANOTHER 'UN.

MATTERS were working so favorably that Dick was beginning to feel considerably elated over his success in Galveston.

True, as yet, he had not made a penny, and there was little prospect that he would; but he did not care for that. He had a snug sum laid away, in several localities, and it was because of his restless spirit and a desire to see something of the coast, that he had come to Galveston.

After leaving the station-house, he instituted quiet inquiries in regard to Ferdinand Ferryle, who had preferred the charge of murder against Mrs. Blair—for, although he had not been near the Blair Cottage since his return to the island, he had heard all about the widow's troubles, and resolved to make a strong attempt to baffle the schemes of her bitter enemy, Horace Henshaw.

The result of his inquiries was to ascertain that the man was occasionally employed as an assistant inspector of gas-meters. When not thus employed, he usually worked at his little carpenter shop, on the south side of the city.

Presuming he would find his man in this shop, Dick set out for the place, which he reached after rather a tedious walk.

It was a dilapidated shanty, with a peaked roof, and two cobweb-covered windows. There was also a rickety door, which hung open by one hinge.

The door being open, Dick stepped within the shop, and found himself in the midst of benches, lumber, tools and shavings.

The "boss" of this establishment was stretched out on the work-bench, with his head propped up against, engaged in seeking solace from a cornucopia pipe.

He was an unprepossessing-looking individual, poorly dressed, carried a red face, hook-nose, and little bead-like eyes. His hair was black, and a goodly portion of his face was covered by a two weeks' stubble of beard.

He surveyed his caller curiously, without any attempt at a salutation.

Dick, not disconcerted, took a seat on an opposite bench, and lit a cigar.

"Any objections to my smoking?" he asked.

"No!" the other replied. "What d'ye want?"

"I want to see the boss!"

"You're another o' them newspaper chaps, hey? If ye aire ye'd better git!"

"Reckon not. That ain't my lay!"

"No? What d'ye want see the boss for?"

"I've got some work I want done."

"Well, I'm the boss."

"You, Ferdinand Ferryle?"

"That's me."

"Well, you see, there's a man to be hung in the jail next week, and I've taken a contract for furnishing the gallows. Want to get your figures for building it?"

"Man goin' to be hung, eh? What fer?"

"For tryin' to swear away the life of another person!"

Ferryle gave a start, and eyed his visitor with quick suspicion.

"What d'ye mean?" he demanded.

"Oh! I mean *you*!" Dick replied. "That racket of yours ain't goin' to work, Ferryle. If you appear in court, and swear you saw Mrs. Blair kill her husband, the little job is going to cost you ten years in State prison."

"Bah! what are you talkin' about? Who are you, anyhow, to come blattin' round my shop. I reckon I know my business," and the irate man picked up a mallet.

"Drop that!" Dick ordered, instantly covering him with his glittering "six." "I reckon I know your business better than you do yourself, Ferryle. I've got you down fine, and you'll find it out, too. If you want to know who I am, I'm a United States detective, and all I'm waiting to see is for you to give false evidence against Mrs. Blair, and I'll put you behind the

bars so quick your teeth won't have time to chatter!"

Ferryle began to look uneasy.

"No one's goin' to give false evidence!" he growled. "I reckon I know what I saw!"

"Well, what did you see?"

"I saw the woman kill her husband. I was around taking the registration of meters, when by mistake I got into the wrong house. I was about retreatin' to the street, when I heard loud words. The door being open, curiosity naturally prompted me to look in. Just as I did so, I saw the woman raise a dirk knife, and plunge it into the breast of a man, who stood before her. You bet I got out of that vicinity, in mighty quick shape!"

"Why didn't you notify the police, at once?"

"To tell the truth, sir, I didn't know what to do, I was so frightened. I came back to my shop, here, and thought the matter over, and finally came to the conclusion that the most sensible thing for me to do was to mind my own business, and keep a still tongue in my head."

"But, I couldn't. The thing kept bothering me so, haunting me night and day, that at last I grew desperate, and believing it my duty, I went and made the affidavit!"

"Ferryle, you are an infernal liar!"

"I am not, and you'd better not call me it, again, or I'll mash your head in with this mallet!"

"You try that dodge and you'll die right on that bench, where you sit. I repeat, you are a liar, and a rascal. I shall produce ample testimony in court to prove that you did not leave this shop from two o'clock in the afternoon of the murder until nine in the same evening. This alone will convict you of willful perjury. The penalty for perjury, in this State, when connected with a willful and malicious purpose to swear away a life, ranges from ten to twenty years."

"I shall further prove that you were hired to swear away Mrs. Blair's life by no less a personage, than Horace Henshaw!"

Ferryle now began to look really alarmed.

"Well, hang it!" he growled. "If you're goin' to do all you say you are, what's the good of your comin' an' tell me about it?"

"To show you what a nice little box you've got yourself into!"

"Well, supposin' I don't testify, at all?"

"You've got to testify, one way or the other!" Dick replied. "You can't get out of it! If you testify against the widow, I'll guarantee you'll be proven a liar, and get ten years the least."

"And if I testify the other way—tell the court that I didn't see no murder, at all—what then? If I tell 'em I was bribed to make the charge, an' tell 'em who bribed me—what then?"

"Well, then, the chances are that you will be let off with a light sentence."

"Then, I allow I'll take the light sentence."

"Which is as good as admitting you were not near the Blair Cottage, at the time of Benjamin Blair's death?"

"Well, I suppose I might as well own up—I wasn't?" Ferryle replied. "After the death of Blair, Henshaw came to me and wanted to know if I cared to make a thousand dollars. I told him yes, and after binding me to secrecy, he told me what would be required, assuring me I would be perfectly safe in preferring the charge, as he would get others to substantiate my statement. After some hesitation I consented. Five hundred was paid me down, and I was to get the other five when conviction was secured!"

"Well, you've fared better than you ought to. Put on your coat, and come with me."

"Come where?"

"To the station. We shall have to keep a watch on you, until we are ready for you, in court!"

Ferryle protested but all in vain. Dick was inflexible and within the hour, had his man safely locked up in the police station!

CHAPTER XV.

DICK ALMOST "POPS."

"WELL, this has been rather a cool day for villains, and not much of a day, either!" Dick muttered, as he left the station-house, after jailing Ferryle.

"I've a notion I might jug a few more, but, I guess two will do for one day. I'll go, now, and see how the Blairs are progressing. No doubt they have given me up for a goner, long ere this."

When he neared the cottage, he quietly removed the false beard from his face.

Reaching the piazza, he found the usual easy-chair there, but without occupants.

The doors and windows of the house were open, however, and he knew some one must be about the premises, so he sat down in a rocker.

By and by, he heard some one come tripping through the hall, and pause in the doorway.

Dick's back was turned to the door, and he acted as if unconscious that any one was near him.

Then, after a moment, the person in the doorway, turned and hurried back through the hall.

She returned, shortly, however, accompanied by two other persons, one of whom, judging by his heavier footsteps, was a man.

The chair Dick occupied, was an old-fashioned affair, with high cane back, which entirely concealed him from the view of those behind him.

So, the man who had accompanied the frightened ladies to the door, and who was no one else than Harry Henshaw, stepped out upon the piazza, and confronted the unannounced caller.

"Well, sir!" he said, "who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Reckon I'm doing all right," Dick replied dryly. "Who are you, and what's bitin' you?"

Then there was a little scream, and the next instant Dick found one of the ladies on either side of him, and his hands clasped in theirs.

"Oh! it's Mr. Bristol! it's Mr. Bristol!" Bethel cried joyously.

"Mr. Bristol it is, indeed!" cried Mrs. Blair. "Oh! isn't this a delightful surprise, for we never expected to see you again."

"Didn't you? Well, I had some doubts about ever coming back to this world again, myself," Dick confessed, "but Old Neptune said that since there's not much doing at the bottom of the ocean, now, I might have a short vacation."

"Oh, nonsense! Please do go on and tell us what all has happened to you during your absence. By the way, Mr. Bristol, this is Mr. Harry Henshaw. He has cut loose from his father and come to board with us."

"I believe I have met the gentleman before," Dick said, rising and extending his hand, which Harry seized and shook warmly.

Then, when they were all seated around him, Dick went on and gave a detailed account of his experience since the night of his capture.

"I am very sorry for one thing, Mrs. Blair," he said, "and that is, that I could not return to you your mourning outfit, which was taken from me."

"Dowt mention it, sir," was the reply, "for I can easily have it replaced, if I have need for it, which I am not sure I shall. You do not know the new trouble I am in, Mr. Bristol?"

"On the contrary, I do know all about it!" assured the detective. "And, further, I have made full preparations to baffle the vengeful schemes of that diabolical villain, Horace Henshaw. Pardon me, sir,"—to Harry—"for using hard names toward your father, but—"

"You are perfectly justified in applying any bad name to him," Harry interrupted, "for if any man ever deserved hanging, it is he. I, personally, shall stand by Mrs. Blair, and tell the court how my own father endeavored to bribe me to abet him in his villainy by uttering a criminal libel."

"Good for you! Oh! there is not the slightest doubt but what we'll make it warm for the villain, and, as for Mrs. Blair, she will be honorably discharged. I can vouch for that."

"You are not certain yet, Mr. Bristol," the widow observed.

"Positive! I have got everything arranged, and my plans and evidence can't fail."

"Well, I hope not, sir. But, come; we must not sit here talking you to death. You have not been to supper, and I know you must be nearly famished. Come, Bethel, set the table. Come, Mr. Harry, you must run to the corner-store for me. If you are to be a boarder of mine, you must make yourself useful."

"Look out for yourself, Bristol; you'll catch it next!" Harry said, rising, with a laugh.

"No he won't," retorted the widow. "You never mind Deadwood Dick. He's already earned and paid his board for a year ahead of time."

The trio then went into the house, leaving Dick sitting on the piazza, in the gathering gloom of the evening, busied with his own thoughts.

His thoughts were not of a business nature—not of what he had done, nor of plans he had in view.

They were of Bethel!

She seemed to be so glad to welcome him back.

Did she really care very much for him—so much that she would be willing to link her fate with his?

This was the question that kept running through his mind, as he sat there in the gloaming, and the thought in itself seemed to give him a sense of deep delight. Involuntarily his eyes closed, but the vision of sweet Bethel was still before him.

Every happy moment has its awakening, and so it was with Dick, when he heard Bethel's gentle voice saying to him:

"Don't go to sleep, Mr. Bristol. Supper will soon be ready."

"Oh! I'm not asleep," he replied, opening his eyes with a smile. "I was just dreaming, that's all!"

"Dreaming? What! and not asleep?"

"Exactly! Dreaming of a vision of feminine loveliness who I seriously fear has made an overwhelming capture of my heart."

"Indeed? You seem to be of quite a romantic turn, to-night, Mr. Bristol. May I ask, does the object of your adoration live far from Galveston?"

"No, not far. In fact, she is quite near me, now," and as he spoke he placed his arm gently around her waist, and drew her nearer to him.

"Bethel," he said, in a low, earnest tone, "did you miss me while I was away, and are you really glad I have come back?"

"Y-e-s," she whispered, avertting her gaze, while the color brightened in her pretty cheeks.

"Then you do care for me a little?" he persisted, taking her soft white hand in his.

"Supper-r-r-r!" came the voice of Mrs. Blair, calling from the dining-room.

"There! come, Mr. Bristol," Bethel said, gently releasing herself. "Your supper is all ready, and waiting for you."

"Supper be hanged!" inwardly moaned Dick, as he arose and followed her into the house.

He found the repast more than satisfactory, however, and did full justice to it.

It was in vain, however, that he tried to get a private word with Bethel during the remainder of the evening, for she cunningly avoided meeting him except when either young Henshaw or her mother was present.

Late that night four men were seated in a private office of the police station, engaged in active consultation.

One was the judge of the police court.

Next to him sat an intelligent-looking old gentleman.

He was judge of the higher court.

Next to him sat Ferdinand Ferryle, while, just across the table, leisurely puffing away at a cigar, sat Deadwood Dick.

What meant this nocturnal meeting?

CHAPTER XVI.

A QUICK TRIAL—CONCLUSION.

EARLY the next morning Mrs. Blair had a hearing before the police court judge, and pleaded "not guilty" to the charge preferred against her in Ferryle's affidavit.

Ferryle was not personally present, but his affidavit was accepted as evidence.

"Mrs. Blair," the judge said, in closing, "it is of course my duty to bind you over to court. Therefore, would you prefer to have your trial take place at once, or have it go over to the next term?"

"I want it to take place at once," she replied.

"Exactly. I presumed you would, and in your behalf have made arrangements with the judge of the higher court, now in session, to have your case come on this afternoon. I will hold your deposit, therefore, pending your appearance this afternoon. Until then, you are discharged."

So the widow, Bethel, and Harry went back to the cottage, while Dick sought out the chief of police, whom he found looking rather disturbed.

"Well, did your men have any success last night?" asked the detective.

"No, not enough to speak of. They caught Frank Mitchell, that's all. The rest of the gang got wind of what was coming, I reckon, and taking the yacht, left for parts unknown."

"Too bad. I see Henshaw and Morey are yet in town?"

"Oh, yes. But they're watched. When does the trial come off? You said they were not to be arrested until then."

"Exactly. I want to expose those two men before the people. Mrs. Blair's case has been remanded to the higher court, and the trial will begin this afternoon." So you will have officers on hand, to nab Henshaw and Morey, when the word is given?"

"I will. Perhaps I will be present, in person."

"Very well."

And Dick returned to the cottage.

Much to his joy, he found Bethel sitting alone on the piazza.

"Ahal now I've got you!" he cried, running up the steps. "I shall insist now, Miss Bethel, upon an answer to that interrupted question of last night."

She flushed a trifle and kept her gaze upon her work, seeming somewhat embarrassed.

"I am sorry, Mr. Bristol," she said "that you insist upon an answer. But, since you do, I will be frank with you. I do think a great deal of you as a friend, and always shall. You have been very kind to us!"

"As a friend?"

"As a friend, and I hope always to have the pleasure of remembering you as such; for, whatever my other feelings might be toward you, I could never be more than a friend to you. There is another who has a stronger claim on me."

"Harry?"

"Yes. We were secretly engaged to each other, over six months ago, but Harry got reckless, through his association with Gil Morey the detective, and neglected me, and gradually we drifted apart. He has come back now, however, with the full determination to be a man again, and entreated me to renew our engagement, and— Well, I—I have done so! I hope, Mr. Bristol, that I have not offended you!"

And her voice was a trifle unsteady as she spoke.

"Not in the least, Miss Bethel," Dick replied. "I respect and honor you all the more for your frankness, and it is my sincere hope that your path through life may be wreathed with the sunshine of perfect happiness."

As he passed on into the house, he thought he heard something suspiciously like a sob, but he did not pause to look back.

Had he done so he would have seen Bethel weeping.

His last words had touched a tender spot.

At two o'clock that afternoon the court-room was packed, when the case of Mrs. Blair was called for trial.

Before calling the first witness, the district attorney arose and said:

"The principal witness for the prosecution has been unavoidably detained, and will not be here for half an hour. Therefore, we will examine the minor witnesses first. Horace Henshaw will take the stand."

There was a flutter of expectation as the scheming lawyer took the stand, and was administered the oath.

"Horace Henshaw, are you acquainted with the prisoner at the bar?"

"I am. Have known her over twenty years."

"Did you know her late husband?"

"I did."

"What sort of a man was he?"

"A very quiet and peaceable person."

"How about his wife?"

"She was rather touchy, inclined to be quarrelsome."

"Were you posted much in regard to the inside affairs of the family?"

"Considerably. Since the deceased was a cripple, I did much toward helping the family along!"

"Did you ever know the husband and wife to quarrel?"

"Frequently."

"Did you hear them threaten each other?"

"Well, no, but I have heard the prisoner express a wish that her husband was dead."

"What reason have you to believe that Mrs. Blair killed her husband?"

"I was told so. I met Ferdinand Ferryle on the street. He asked me if I knew the Blairs, and I told him I did. He then said he had just seen Mrs. Blair plunge a dirk knife into her husband's breast. I rushed to the cottage and found Blair dead on the floor. The widow declared he had committed suicide. For a time I believed her, and kept my own counsel, but, finally, I went and had a consultation with Ferryle, and advised him to make an affidavit as to what he saw."

"That will do, sit down. Gilbert Morey to the front."

Morey took the box and was sworn.

He testified that he had boarded in the Blair family for nearly a year, up to within a few days; that he had frequently heard Mrs. Blair say she had a mind to kill the old scarecrow, meaning her husband, and, on one occasion, he, Morey, had been obliged to take a pistol away from her, to prevent an outright murder.

Ferdinand Ferryle was then brought forward and put under oath.

"Did you see Mrs. Blair stab her husband, as set forth in your affidavit?" he was asked.

"I did not!"

"Does not your affidavit state differently?"

"It does."

"Then, sir, why the affidavit?"

"I was bribed to do the business, sir!"

"Then, why are you going back on the person who bribed you?"

"Because I fully realize what a cowardly thing I have done, and want to repair the injury so far as possible."

"Who bribed you?"

"Horace Henshaw. He came to me, and offered me a thousand dollars if I would swear the woman's life away. I was greatly in want of money at the time, and in a fit condition to be corrupted. I received five hundred dollars down, and was to receive the balance when the woman was convicted!"

"Put Horace Henshaw and Gilbert Morey under arrest!" thundered the judge, and it was done, in quick order.

Mrs. Blair and Bethel next testified respectively, and told their story in a straightforward manner.

After which Deadwood Dick took the stand, and narrated in detail, his experience and what he had accomplished, from the day of his arrival in Galveston, up to the present time.

As may be supposed, his story created a profound sensation.

Harry Henshaw next testified as to his father's attempt to bribe him, and was followed by Bill Little, who revealed Horace Henshaw's connection with the Ghouls.

The judge then charged the jury, who brought in a unanimous verdict, for Mrs. Blair of "not guilty," without leaving their seats.

The judge then made a few remarks, highly complimenting Deadwood Dick, and ordering Horace Henshaw, Gil Morey and Ferryle off to jail, and signing Little's release, he adjourned the court.

There is little more to add.

Of course it has not been the author's privilege to give real names, so all that remains to say is:

Horace Henshaw was given a long term of imprisonment, and will probably never live to see freedom again.

Gil Morey got ten years, and Ferd Ferryle was thankful to get free board for only six months.

Of course Dick was the admired of all during the remainder of his stay in Galveston, which was only a couple of weeks. Several prominent citizens clubbed together and made up a handsome purse, and the chief of police presented him a handsome badge.

The Ghouls who made their escape in the yacht, will ever after give the Gulf Metropolis a wide berth, it is probable.

Through the assistance of Bill Little, the remains of Benjamin Blair were recovered, and reinterred in their former resting-place.

Roxy, whom Dick had placed temporarily in a boarding-school, when she heard of his intention of leaving the city nearly cried her eyes out, and begged so piteously to have him take her with him, that after some deliberation he resolved to allow her to accompany him as far as Omaha, where he knew of a kind family who would be only too glad to adopt her.

The last week of his stay in Galveston, the Blairs seemed to over-exert themselves to make things pleasant, but at last, when the hour came to say good-by, Bethel was nowhere to be found.

So he had to be content with saying good by to the widow and Harry; then he and his protegee started for the ferry, which was to take them across the bay to the mainland, where they were to take a north-bound train.

A considerable number of people were at the ferry, to see him off, and among them—Bethel!

Though clad in mourning, he knew her instantly, and after he had shaken hands with the crowd, he approached her.

"Good-by, Bethel," he said. "I thought I was going to miss you."

"No," she replied, in a faltering voice, "I could not say good-by, at the cottage. Good-by, Dick. Here is a ring I bought for you. Take it and keep it, and if you ever think to look at it, remember—then—that—Bethel—loves you!"

She broke utterly down, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

The whistle shrieked, the bell clanged, and Dick had just time to kiss her tenderly, and get aboard the boat as it moved out from the pier.

Even after the boat was in mid-water, between island and mainland, Dick could see her standing on the pier, gazing after him.

THE END.

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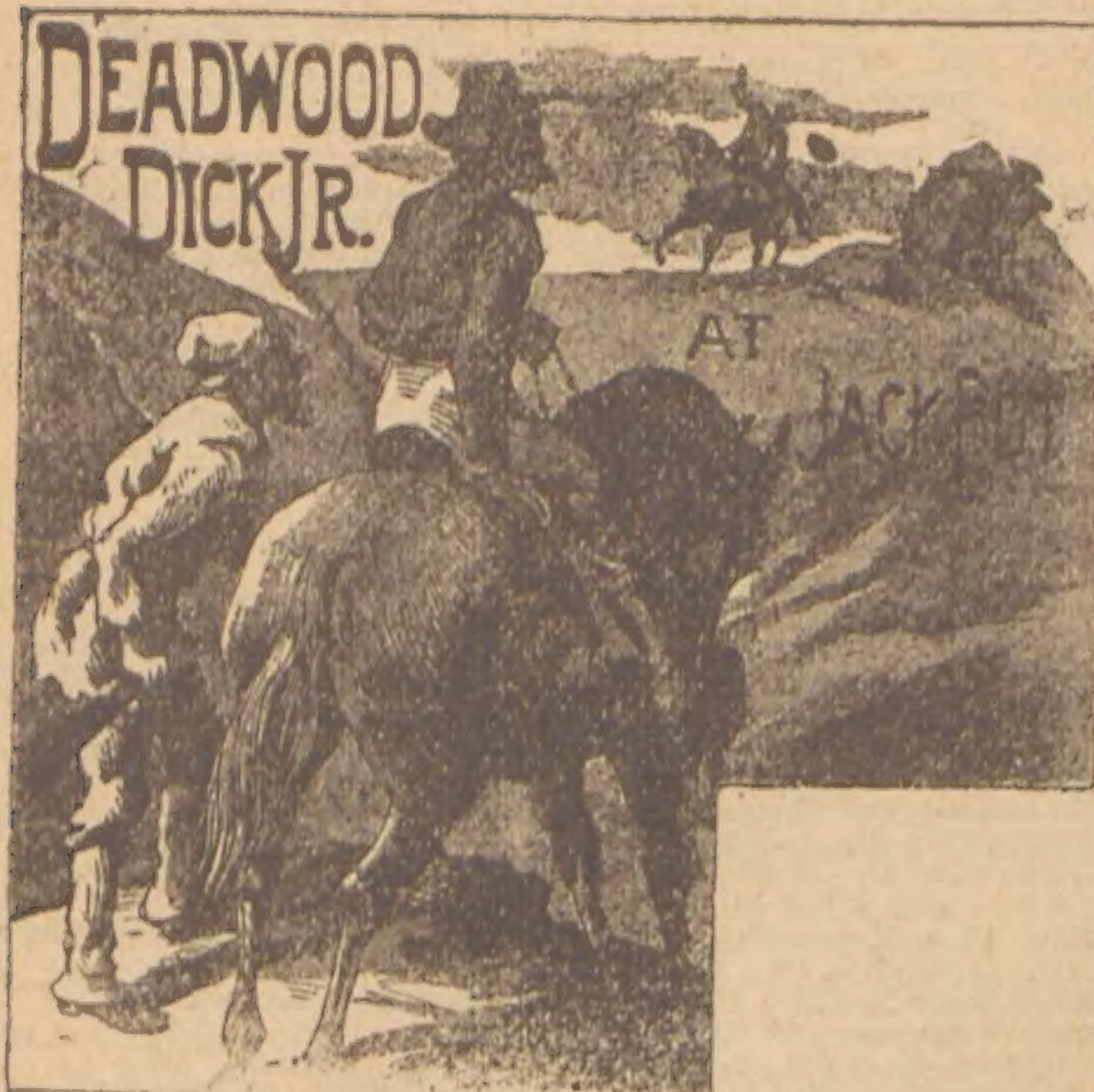
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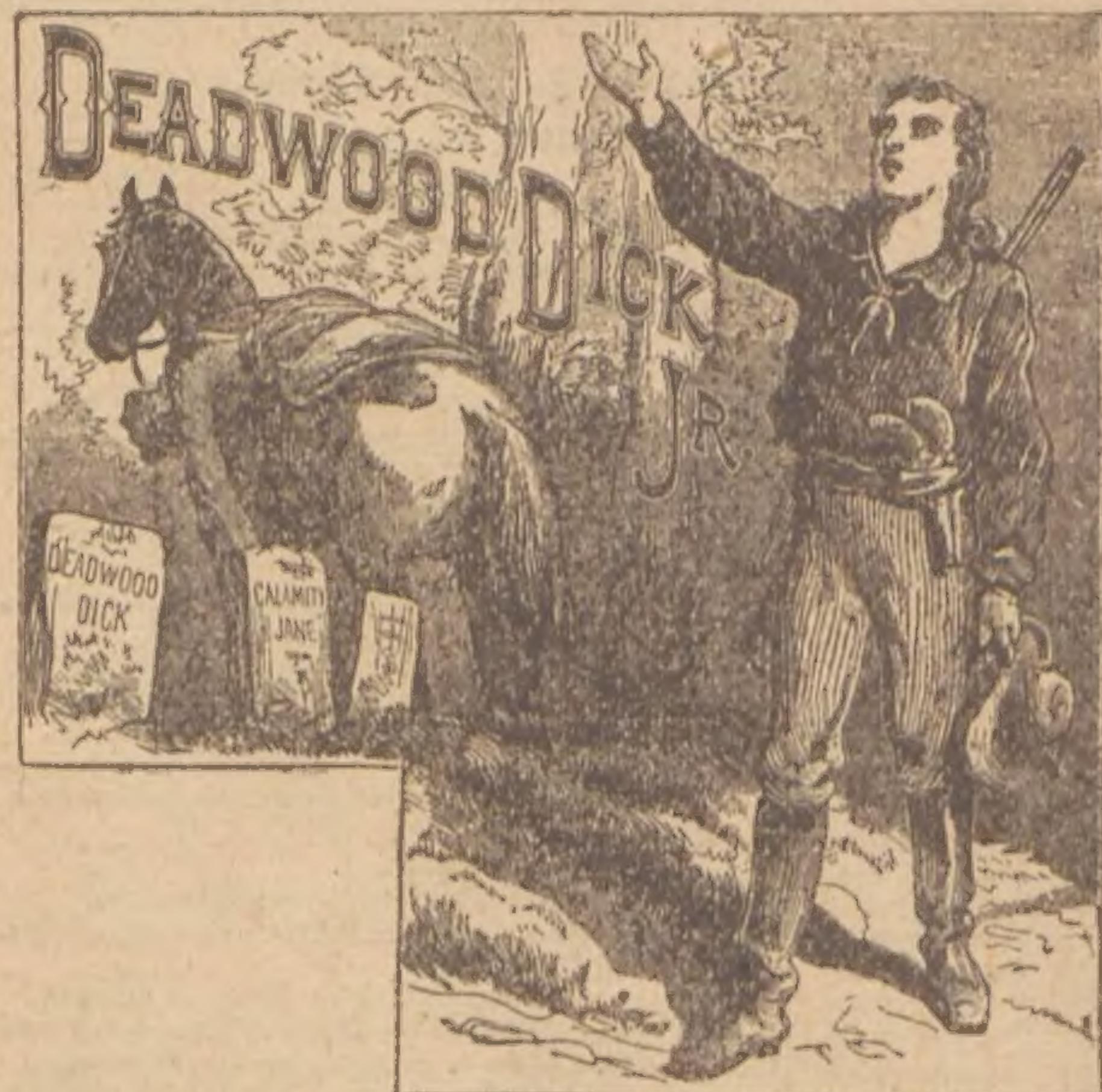
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